



THE PLAYBOY AND THE STABLE GIRL

Spendthrift

ERIC HATCH



A BANTAM BOOK
Complete and Unabridged

Spendthrift

by

Eric Hatch


A Bantam Book
published by arrangement with
Little, Brown & Company

Bantam edition published
December 1948

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Printed in the United States of America

Introduction

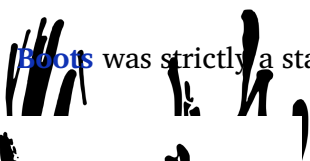


Towny Middleton was the poorest millionaire in forty-eight states, the most poverty-stricken country squire who ever tried to juggle a large estate, a racing stable, and sky-high life on absolutely nothing per annum. But even if he didn't have a cent, Towny had plenty of trouble, women, worries, and ... *women!*

Topsy was a chorus girl, and she loved him ...



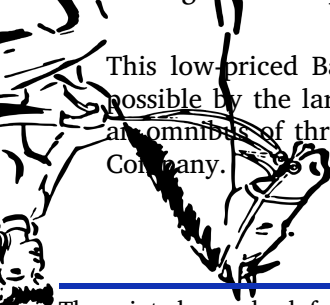
Sally was a southern belle, and she adored him ...



Boots was strictly a stable-girl, and she worshipped him ...

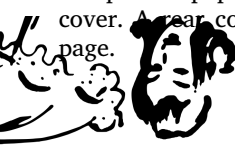


Something had to happen ... *everything did!*



This low-priced Bantam book, complete and unabridged, was made possible by the large sale and effective promotion of *The Hatch Way*, an omnibus of three Eric Hatch novels, published by Little, Brown & Company.

The printed paperback features the text and ink sketches of this introduction on its back cover. A rear cover image similar to the original layout appears as this ebook's final page.



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Back Cover

The Derby Special with its ultra special and wildly assorted cargo, or human freight, rolled slowly on this soft May evening into the heart of the South. The front car was devoted solely to three animals belonging to one Townsend Middleton: a black race horse, a Dalmatian dog, and a pink-and-white stable pony that looked like James J. Farley and was named, regardless of its neuterness, Elvira. Elvira always accompanied the race horse. His presence soothed her nerves.

Behind this car came the Pullmans filled with professional racegoers, touts, bookies and ordinary run-of-the-wool suckers. At the back of the train came two private cars loaned by a railroad president and devoted solely to the use of Townsend Middleton and his friends. The friends were, socially, terrifically snappy—almost as snappy as Townsend Middleton—with a couple of exceptions. The exceptions were a moving picture actress who had invited herself, a chorus girl who, Middleton knew, was a friend of the railroad president, and Bill. Bill weighed two hundred and ten pounds, was superbly dressed, and had a face that looked as though his mother on seeing it for the first time must, in a fit of pique, have stomped upon it. Bill, of unknown origin, was to Middleton what the stable pony was to the race horse.

The train slowed for a station. Bill immediately rose from his lonely seat at one end of the car and addressed his highball with all the courtesy he would have shown a human drinking companion.

“Gotta leave you for a minute,” he said. “Be back.” With the easy swinging grace of a he-elephant he swung himself down the car to where Townsend Middleton was talking to the picture girl. He raised a forefinger in the air in a sort of informal salute and said, nodding toward the town appearing outside the windows, “I’m wit you, Chief.” Whereupon he promptly left.

The picture girl turned to Middleton. She had often dreamed of going places in a private railroad car with one of the big-shot heirs (her expression) of the country and it seemed to her Bill struck a hopelessly discordant note. She said, “Do you always take that man with you when you travel?”

Middleton looked at her, saw right through her to what she was

thinking and laughed. He had a nice laugh. It was as full of the joy of life as a kid throwing banana peels on a pavement.

"Sure," he said. "I like Bill."

"But why ...?" She caught herself. "I mean who is he?"

In Mildred Hughes' world everyone was someone. They had a tag, a label. It made it so easy to know whether to be downright insulting to people or just refined-snooty.

Middleton laughed again.

"If I was a big-shot movie producer," he said, "Bill would be called a yes man. Actually he's a no man."

"But what's he *do*?"

"He says, 'No,'" said Middleton, and drank deep of the good whisky in his glass. He drank it almost as though he were afraid this might be the last batch of good whisky he'd ever have.

Mildred came all over coy.

"Would he say 'No' to me, Towny?"

Middleton shook his head and patted her hand because it seemed the indicated thing to do and said to himself, "If you knew about me what I know about me, Baby, you wouldn't give me that Lubitsch look."

Mildred sighed. The train suddenly jerked to a halt, upsetting the chorus girl's drink on her dress. She said, "Some rattler, Towny, wait till I tell Popsy what I think of how he runs his railroad!"

Across the way from her, Mrs. Ashton, who had been born to the purple and for the past three or four years had been more blue than purple, but who still had a horse running in the Derby, turned slightly green. She had never admitted—even to herself—that railroad presidents mingle, so to speak, with chorus girls and she didn't like being practically told so. As she turned green she looked out the window and when she looked out of the window she gave a little yelp and said, "Oh, *Towny!* Look at that *man!*"

Townsend knew by "that man" she meant Bill. He looked. On the station platform what might be described as all hell had suddenly broken loose. A small group of the local citizenry had got inextricably entangled in a semi-private free-for-all. Fists were flailing, noses were bleeding. In the center of the maelstrom, like Gibraltar buffeted by a choppy sea, stood Bill. It took Townsend Middleton a little under five seconds to get out of the car and perhaps another five to fight his way to the side of his "No man."

Bill saw him coming. From his pocket he hauled a small implement of warfare whose name was but a diminutive of his own. He plied it. As he

plied he muttered.

“Dis ain’t *my* wish” (*socko!*) “I ain’t one not to retain sudden hospitality in *kind*” (*socko!*) “But I can’t *take*” (*socko!*) “chances” (*socko!*) “wid de Chief!” (a sort of soft, almost half-hearted *socko* as the last of the most violent fighters subsided).

Middleton grabbed him by the arm.

“Cut it out!” he yelled. “For God’s sake cut it out and get back on that train!”

“Okay, chief,” said Bill. He raised his voice so that the conductor of the special, who was frittering around the edges of the *mêlée* like a hen with ducklings, could hear: “De next time you kidnappers send trets to us, remember dis time when you sent trets to us! Look what’s happened!”

Middleton led him toward the train. No one sought to interfere with them. As they reached the conductor, he said, “This is outrageous!”

Middleton meant that it was outrageous of Bill to have, in his own small way, re-started a war that had been settled some sixty-odd years before. The conductor said, “I’m *sorry*, Mr. Middleton! They flagged the train, sir—the gall of them!”

Middleton pushed Bill up the steps.

“Gall of *who*?” he said.

“Dem!” said Bill, shaking his billy toward the fallen warriors. “De gall of dem flaggin’ de train!”

The conductor hustled them into the vestibule and pulled his tooting cord. The train started. Middleton turned to Bill.

“Bill,” he said. “Why did you do it? I’m ashamed of you. By God, I really am ashamed of you!”

Bill looked down. He felt like a soldier of the Foreign Legion who, having captured an enemy fort, finds his commander doesn’t think it is really a fort at all, but more a camel stable. He knocked his knees together as was his habit when embarrassment overtook him. Then The Right To Be Heard asserted itself. He straightened.

“I tell you,” he said. “I saw a coupla guys. I said to myself, ‘Bill,’ I said, ‘dem’s plasterers sure!’ So I sailed into ‘em.”

“Plasterers?” said Middleton.

“Sure!” said Bill, the way one says “Don’t you know nuttin’?” if one is the sort of person who says “Don’t you know nuttin’?” Bill nodded, solon-fashion. “Dey was too. I got dese.”

He reached in his billy pocket and pulled out two folded papers. They were blue—that unpleasant-colored blue that is the standardized color

for judges' stationery the country over.

Middleton looked at them. He still had Bill by the arm. His grip tightened now.

"Thanks, Bill," he said.

"Aw, shoot!" said Bill, knocking his knees again. "We owes it to de filly in de baggage car, don't we?"

"Yes," said Middleton. He laughed. "You know, Bill, I'd clean forgot my stud farm was in this state."

"I hadn't," said Bill.

"How did you know they were process-servers?"

Now Bill laughed.

"I didn't," he said. "I just t'ought dey might be." Feeling this sounded too cocksure, he added, "An' I wanted to keep my hand in anyhow."

Shrouded in gloom, modified slightly by Bill's exhibition of loyalty, Middleton started to make his way back into the car. He was tired—awfully tired—of being a rich man without any money. He was tired of dodging summonses and wracking his brains on how to keep the ancestral place on Long Island going on nothing until his uncle died and he inherited. He was sick to death of the people who surrounded him: the moochers, the sponges, the inane "nice people," the cooing babes with the glint of gold in their eyes.

He turned and headed for the front of the train to visit with the race filly. He knew that, like Bill, she would run true for him till she dropped. If she pulled it off to-morrow—he sighed vastly—if she pulled it off to-morrow he could stop worrying for a couple of months anyway, what with the purse and what he had on her at long odds.

"To-morrow!" he said half-aloud.

2

Churchill Downs.... Hot sunshine and the sweet smell of honeysuckle and roses and Paris perfume and Havana cigars and Kentucky Burton and green grass growing.... Thousands and thousands of people milling and shoving and joking and picking pockets and waving racing programs and hoping.... Flags on the grandstand and clubhouse; and the track, freshly combed, lying like the brown rim of a teakwood roulette wheel....

Middleton stood in the paddock watching Black Mamba being slowly walked in a circle behind Elvira. With him were his trainer, Pop O'Connel, and Bill. All three of them were trembling violently inside their clothes, but outwardly being very calm and suave as became the dignity of the Owner, Trainer, and No Man of the Greenhill Stable. They spoke little in this tense moment of expectancy when the world seemed almost to stand still and wait for the gods of chance to tell it that it could go on again. They spoke not at all of the race.

Middleton said, "She looks fit, O'Connel. You've done a good job."

Bill said, "Yeah."

O'Connel said, "Mr. Middleton, look at Boots, will ye? I done my damndest to get her to dress up an' let the boy do that leadin' around just for to-day. But no! Look at her!"

Middleton looked. On Elvira, dressed in the oldest imaginable boots and breeches and wearing a worn yellow turtle-neck sweater, rode O'Connel's daughter Valerie.

"She told me the Mamba filly was used to lookin' at her there in them clothes and'd be upset else. Bah! She's a fair disgrace to us! I should think the filly'd be ashamed."

The filly wasn't ashamed. It seemed right to her that Boots should be there on Elvira dressed just as she was. It made her feel at home and eased the unknown terror and joy that coursed through her and brought white sweat to her flanks and made her slim legs tremble as Bill's big ones did when he was embarrassed. Middleton put his hand on O'Connel's shoulder.

"You're wrong, Pop," he said. Still looking he said, "She's a pretty kid, Pop. Don't see how you did it."

Valerie (Boots) O'Connel wasn't a kid at all. She was eighteen and she had wide violet eyes and a tiny-featured face that was all screwed up now into an expression of fearful, childlike determination.

Pop O'Connel said, "Oh, pshaw!"—belittling his achievement, yet definitely recognizing it.

Bill said, "She thinks she trained the horse, I bet."

"Did she?" said Middleton.

"Well, she helped," said O'Connel.

A bugle blew. Wee Willie Walker, the Greenhill jock, came up adjusting his cap.

"Any special instructions, sir?"

"Yes," said Middleton. "For God's sake win!"

A voice he had never heard; a low voice and soft after the manner of voices in that part of the world, spoke over his shoulder.

"Does it mean as much as that to you, Mr. Middleton?"

He turned quickly. A girl—or young woman—was standing beside him. She was smiling in a friendly sort of way. He looked at her then, he looked at her hard and blinked, for this lady was startlingly easy to look at and she was so very superbly turned out in just the right thing to wear to the Kentucky Derby that one knew instinctively she must be the daughter either of a Kentucky Colonel or of that roving sportsman the Earl of Derby himself. Middleton caught the look in her eyes and grinned.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "it does."

"I didn't think it could—to men like you."

It suddenly struck him that it was very odd, this, standing talking so with a total stranger at a place like Churchill Downs, but he continued to grin. The girl was so friendly and matter-of-fact and outright that he warmed to her.

"But then you see," he said, "you obviously don't know very much about men like me."

"I see them every year when they come here," she said.

Wee Willie Walker was tossed high into the saddle. The girl smiled once more, said "I hope you do win—truly I do," and walked away.

O'Connel and Middleton slowly followed the black filly as she made her dainty way over the grass to join the other horses on their way to the post. Before her still tramped Elvira and Boots. Boots was openly trembling now; but Elvira, as always, gave forth an aura of great calm. Elvira thought all of this rather silly. But then he didn't know about money to be won and lost and glory and fame and such things. He knew

clover when he saw it, and oats, and did very well thank you without greater knowledge.

Middleton, watching him, his heart bashing around in his chest, envied him with all his heart.

Townsend Middleton never knew afterwards how he got through that afternoon. The race was forever in his mind an indelible picture, or series of pictures—hazy, the way golden dreams and vivid nightmares are hazy, but always to be remembered. He watched it, of course, through his binoculars, oblivious to his party surrounding him in the box, oblivious to everything except a great noise and the colored shimmering dots he saw that became horses as they drew near, dancing dots again as they drew away.

Black Mamba, quiet at the post—nervously quiet the way a thoroughbred should be.... The bell, and a thunder of steel hooves drowned by the thunder of many voices blended in the great sigh, “They’re off!”

Dancing dots as they reached the first turn.... His own colors indistinguishable in the ruck.... The second turn and the field strung out.... His Gray and Red fourth now, the black filly fighting Wee Willie for her head.... *This* was what she was frightened of—*this* was what she was joyful of: to run and run and run as fast as ever a horse *could* run, until those others were behind her, not flinging gravel and dust in her eyes—until she was in front with only the brown ribbon of wondrously springy dust ahead of her to spurn under flying feet; to hear the roar of the crowd as she came into the stretch and crossed the line—to trot back proudly to the winner’s circle—to have much fond rubbing and one hell of a swell feed, and to be walked in clover in the dusk and talked to in soft worshipful voices.... Wee Willie, crouched like a tiny monkey, fought her back. He muttered over and over, “Not now, Mamby, not now. *Wait*, Mamby!”—and in the stands Middleton’s heart grew faint as they came to the end of the back stretch and the Gray and Red still stayed fourth. They went so, into the last turn.

Then through his glasses he saw Wee Willie move—inch forward in the saddle.

“Now!” he said aloud.

“*Now!*” Wee Willie screamed to the heaving black neck topped by flickering ears that made up his entire windswept world. “Now! Run, Mamby, run!”

The little ears flicked sharply back and laid there as the weight on her moved forward and the pull on her mouth relaxed. Three shapes and lots of flying gravel ahead—a space between two of the shapes.... *This was it.* Her neck thrust far out, her hooves scarce touching the ground, her heart near bursting within her from the effort, she made for the hole. High above her Wee Willie shrieked pleadingly, “Run, Mamby!” They’d passed two of the shapes, the third hung on ahead; “Oh Goddammit Mamby run! You’re winning a Derby for God’s sake Baby! Please!”

Black Mamba ran. Foot by foot she caught up with the leader, swung level,—there was the brown ribbon of dust ahead, there was the roar of the crowd,—but she couldn’t pass. There was a weight—a new strange weight from the side—dragging her back. It was as though someone were actually tugging at her saddlecloth. She could feel, even in the excitement, the back of a bony hand there by her girth.

“Bastard!” The word was flung on the wind—it sounded absurd in such a small voice as Wee Willie’s. Then there came a thud,—only a horse could have heard it, it was such a little thud; and then that new weight was gone and Black Mamba, free again, raced down the brown ribbon to victory.

But no one—at least no one who would admit it: not the judges, not even Middleton—no one but Wee Willie Walker had seen that hand clutch Mamba’s saddlecloth, hang on for dear life, try to jerk her out of her stride. All anyone had seen was Wee Willie Walker raising his bat and clouting the other jockey on the head.

No one listened to Wee Willie in the stewards’ stand when all of the sixty thousand people there waited in dead silence to see what the decision would be and while Black Mamba pranced a little like a tired lady who has done her stuff and just for the hell of it kicked over the broadcasting apparatus. The other jockey was an old-timer. Wee Willie was just a kid riding his first Derby who’d got excited. They didn’t suspend him. They merely disqualified Black Mamba and broke his heart—and broke Townsend Middleton—to the wide.

It was a little unpleasant for Wee Willie when he left the stewards’ stand. In fact there were a great many people who wanted to revive the old Southern custom of lynching. But Middleton was on one side of him now and Bill on the other, and Wee Willie couldn’t see very well through his tears anyway, so he didn’t realize his danger.

When they got through the track gates (behind Mamba who was still pleased as punch with herself because *she* knew she’d won) Willie

became coherent.

"Mr. Middleton—he grabbed my saddle cloth. *You* saw him, didn't you?"

Middleton looked down at the boy. He too was dazed at the moment. In fact he didn't see how he was going to raise money enough to get the horse home, even.

"No, Willie," he said, "I didn't see him."

"And no one else did!" put in O'Connel.

Middleton ignored O'Connel. He had raced too much not to know the unholy fury of trainers when this and that goes against them. He put his arm around the tiny jock.

"Did he grab it, Willie?"

"Yes *sir*! Mamby was goin' like hell; then—"

Middleton lifted his arm, made a fist and struck the boy sharply with it.

"Listen, Willie," he said. "*I* believe you. There's no good my telling the stewards so, because they all know I'm broke. You—rode—a swell—race. See? It's all swell, see?"

"Gee, I feel fierce!" said Willie. He didn't really feel so awfully fierce, because he *had* ridden a Derby winner. It was only Middleton's magnanimity and friendliness that made him feel that a little self-pity was, perhaps, in order.

"Go see the filly gets a swell feed," said Middleton, who knew Mamba would like to be cried on by a jockey—whereas he hated it, not being a horse.

"Yessir!" said Willie.

His shoulders went back. He saluted with his bat and hurried on after the filly. Middleton heard murmurs of sympathy from this sponger and that—in fact from all the people who had come down with him in the private cars and who had all bet on the horse that was given the win. He said the right thing in each case and tried to look as though losing even the remains of a fortune was nothing. He was very busy doing the simplest and most generally used sort of mathematics,—namely, subtraction.

Middleton, doing his subtraction, had unconsciously followed the horse back to the paddock. He was standing now, staring vacant-eyed as O'Connel sponged out her mouth and Boots worked on her back that twitched luxuriating under the motion of the sweat-scraper.

"Say, Chief! Say, Chief!" Bill, who had seen Wee Willie safely into the jockeys' room, arrived out of breath. "I tink I got de horse sold!"

Middleton snapped out of his reverie.

“What’s that?”

“Colonel Jeffords. He wants to buy de filly. He said tell you he’d give a hundred grand!”

Middleton’s eyes opened in amazement. A hundred thousand was more than he’d have made had he won. It would go a long way toward creditor-stalling. He walked over to O’Connel.

“Pop,” he said quietly, “we’re temporarily saved. Colonel Jeffords will buy Mamba.”

“Fine!” said O’Connel and went on with his sponging.

Boots stopped her scraping and looked suddenly at Middleton, her eyes filled with horror. Then with her head hidden from him she went on with her work; but there were tears, now, mingling with the sweat. Middleton saw this, in spite of the fact that Boots tried to hide it.

“Boots,” he said.

She went on scraping.

“Boots,” he stepped up beside her. “If I sold Mamba I’d have to sell you along with her to take care of her, and I’m not at all sure Colonel Jeffords would want to buy you.”

“What kind of talk’s this?” said O’Connel.

“I was just telling Boots,” said Middleton, “that Black Mamba’s not for sale.”

He turned and strolled slowly in the direction of the clubhouse. Behind him Bill and O’Connel looked at each other and shook their heads. Boots threw her arms around the filly’s sloppy neck and clung there. Middleton, looking back at them over his shoulder, laughed.

“What the hell,” he said. “It’d be like selling Bill!”

He was moved and he didn’t like being moved. Too much emotion had been crowded into too short a period of time. He wanted now, above everything else, to get unemoted. Across the lawn he saw the figure of the girl who had spoken to him in the paddock before the race. He headed toward her.

Sally Barnaby was definitely crinoline. She thought all handsome men were wonderful and that rich handsome men with racing stables were ultra-wonderful. She thought life should be made up of rose gardens and cotillions and moonlight and soft music and love; and for some years—in fact since she'd come out—had been vaguely disappointed to find it made up of a father who was blowing-in most of a dwindling fortune on stimulant of inferior vintage, of scrimping for clothes, of Country Club Saturday-night dances, and of uncouth local yokels taking the place of the rich handsome swains of her imagining.

To Sally Barnaby, Townsend Middleton walking across the clubhouse lawn looked like manna to Moses. To Townsend Middleton, Sally Barnaby looked like someone it would be frightfully nice to go and bust a bottle of champagne with. He somehow didn't feel like being with his own party. He wanted a strange shoulder to weep on. What he needed was a good bartender with time on his hands; failing that,—for all the bartenders at Churchill Downs were frightfully busy,—something lovely to look upon who seemed sweetly sympathetic would suit him nicely.

"Look," he said. "Let's go get something to drink." Then, this not sounding quite right to him, he childishly added, "It's hot."

"That's a *nice* idea," she said; "it's often so hot in Louisville."

"I can't for the life of me remember your name," said Middleton, "but it was nice of you to say you hoped Mamby'd win."

"You don't know my name because we'd never met. It's Sally Barnaby."

"Oh," said Middleton—"Colonel Barnaby's daughter."

"D'you know him, Mr. Middleton?"

He shook his head.

"No—but I was sure he'd be one."

She looked puzzled, so he amplified.

"I mean this being Kentucky and you being so damned attractive. I didn't see how he could have missed it."

She skipped this. It was over her head and seemed to her merely to be confusing things. She said, "I don't suppose I really should have spoken to you—without our having been introduced I mean."

They passed into the club bar and sat down at a table. Townsend ordered champagne, then settled himself comfortably and looked across at Sally Barnaby. This sort of thing was right up her alley. She looked back at him—winsomely.

“Did you-all lose a fortune when your horse was disqualified?”

“I certainly did!” said Townsend Middleton. “And I didn’t have it to lose!”

“Oh, come on,” said Sally. “Everybody knows you’re one of the richest men in the country.”

“If you want to think that, go ahead,” said Townsend.

“But I do! It makes you so exciting. You see—” here she looked down, letting her lashes, which, as lashes go, were quite something, caress the rose petals of her cheek—“you see, father and I haven’t any money. Just pride.”

“Southern pride,” said Townsend.

“We’re lousy with it,” said Sally. Then they both laughed.

“Lots of birthright and no pottage,” said Townsend. “I know all about that. *I’ve* even incorporated my rich uncle’s blood pressure. I sell shares in it. When it goes up the shares go up.”

“I think you’re cute,” said Sally.

The champagne arrived, was served. They drank, looking into each other’s eyes. At this moment Topsy Martin, the railroad president’s chorus girl, also arrived.

“Well!” she said. “If it isn’t Charley the Wine Buyer! Me too.” She sat down. “Who’s your friend?”

“Sally Barnaby. She’s helping me forget.”

“I see. I’m intruding. My name’s Topsy Martin.” She held out her hand.

“I’m glad to know you,” said Sally.

Topsy Martin went on. “Towny, what happened to that prize bacon-bringer-homer of yours? I lost my shirt on her.”

“Wee Willie got impetuous,” said Townsend. “He didn’t like that jockey grabbing his saddlecloth.”

“I wouldn’t like him to grab mine,” said Topsy. She seized Townsend’s glass and emptied. “S’nice fizz.”

“Why don’t you beat it?” said Townsend. “Sally and I are talking.”

Topsy made a face at him.

“I don’t mind,” she said. “Say anything you like. I’ve been around.” Then, to Sally: “You native talent?”

Sally instinctively liked this fresh creature. She smiled.

"Not from choice," she said. "I was raised here."

"Must be tough," said Topsy.

Townsend gave her a look. He said, "Don't mind her, Sally. She's been gushing about the South ever since last night."

"I don't mind," said Sally, "because you see I really do hate it here." Suddenly her eyes, which normally were entirely bovine, grew bright. Her whole expression changed to one of intense seriousness. It made her really beautiful. "I'd give *anything*—to get away from here."

"Hell," said Topsy, "that's easy. Come back in the private car with us to-night." She shoved Middleton with her elbow. "Charley the Wine Buyer here'll take you over the hurdles."

Townsend saw the look of Alice going through the looking glass cross Sally Barnaby's face. He didn't know that she felt the emotions of a dainty slave maiden going on the auction block mingled with those of a small child being set in the middle of a strawberry shortcake and told it can eat its way out. All he knew was that he seemed to hold in his hand a full cup of joy for someone who was more than lovely enough to deserve it.

"Why not?" he said. "You could stay with Topsy."

"Oh, I couldn't possibly go!" said Sally. She laughed nervously, high color in her cheeks. "Why, I've only just met you-all and we're really terribly respectable. I couldn't." She paused, then added: "I've never been to New York." It was as though she had said, "I've never been to heaven."

"Have some more champagne," said Townsend. "It'll make it look easier."

Sally thought she had never seen a man smile at her so kindly. She said, "I—Really, I—"; stopped, tossed off a glass of the wine, glowed, and said, "I'll come—if I can get Daddy to let me!"

"Daddy?" said Topsy, arching her brows.

"Father—Colonel Barnaby." She stood up and took Middleton's hand, her eyes turned on, full candlepower. "Do you really mean it—Townsend?"

He nodded and pressed her hand. He was surprised for a second at how pleasant pressing this hand seemed. It made him want to do all kinds of things for and to its owner.

"Of course I mean it. Tell the old loon—I mean, tell him Mrs. Peter Ashton will be chaperoning you—on the car."

"I'll see if I can find him."

With a quick smile over her shoulder she was gone. Topsy looked at

Townsend Middleton and shook her head the way one does when one sees a peculiarly pathetic half-wit. She said, "You've bought something, Towny."

He didn't seem to hear. He was supremely engrossed in watching the back of Sally Barnaby moving through the crowd.

"I said you've bought something, Towny."

"Hungh?"

"I think it loves you. Do you care?"

"Don't be an ass," said Townsend. "Come on, let's watch this race."

"But howsa boutsa girl friend?"

"We'll come back here after. Come on."

"Poor Towny."

"You think she'll come?"

"With bells—church bells—on."

"We'll take her to the Sefton Club for dinner. She'll get a kick out of it, poor kid."

"Poor Towny," said Topsy again. For a little girl, Topsy Martin knew a lot. But then, as she herself said, she had been around.

Townsend Middleton and even Topsy, who had been around, would have been very considerably surprised had they followed Sally Barnaby as she lost herself in the crowd. She went directly to a telephone booth and called a number. When she got it, she asked for Colonel Barnaby; and then after a moment she said, with scarcely any perceptible Southern accent at all: "Well, you loafer, I got him."

The Sefton Club is now to Louisville what The Brook is to Saratoga. Ivory balls spin merrily in teakwood wheels. Ivory cubes rattle merrily on green baize and in whirling wire cages. Near-ivory chips slide hopefully from pockets and evening bags. Practically no water is drunk there. Things are frighteningly, delightfully expensive.

Townsend Middleton got a great kick out of having Sally Barnaby with them there because, judging from her elated condition, Sally Barnaby was getting a great kick out of it. He didn't know this was not because she had never been there before but because the Sefton Club was the one place in Louisville where she could be sure of not stumbling over her father snoozing loudly in some hallway. Its doors had been closed to Colonel Barnaby for some time—for obvious reasons. All through dinner and for some little time afterwards Townsend enjoyed to the full the pleasant sensation of a genial philanthropist taking an unusually charming and well-behaved female orphan on a picnic. He liked her, his friends seemed to like her, dinner was excellent, the wine was stimulating and mellowing, and, all in all, in spite of his immediate financial crisis things seemed pretty fine.

This condition of things seeming pretty fine lasted until a few minutes before eleven. At this point a captain of waiters came to him at the table where he and Sally were playing hazard for dollar chips and drew him aside.

"There's a Colonel Barnaby outside to see you, sir."

This was just the captain's way of being nasty. He knew perfectly well this wasn't any old "A Colonel Barnaby."

"Tell him to wait," said Middleton. He turned to Sally as the waiter went off. "By the way," he said, "what did—the Colonel—say when you told him about the proposed junket?"

Sally Barnaby, who had been doing her utmost to seem intent on hazard the while she was practically stretching her ears off to hear what the waiter said, smiled innocently the way only Southern girls can smile innocently, and answered.

"He said he was glad for me to have the chance to go get a look at New York."

This was, of course, an out-and-out lie.

“Swell!” said Townsend. “Play these for me, Sally. I’ve got to go and see a fella.”

Sally, pretending misunderstanding, accepted a handful of chips and shoved them on Number Four. Townsend, with that sense of impending disaster that comes to all of us now and again, headed for the front of the club. Frankly, he suspected Sally of chicanery. Since, due to his own background and upbringing, he couldn’t conceive of any father allowing such a daughter to go rollicking off with practically strangers, he guessed that she had left a note and he guessed further that this Colonel Barnaby would be none too pleased. The Colonel part of the name instinctively frightened him. It conjured up such a picture of horsewhips and horse pistols and what not.

Halfway to the reception room he paused, looked in a mirror and straightened tie and shoulders, and then, trying to look as dignified as possible, advanced to meet what he felt were terrific odds. He was thoroughly surprised to find, lounging comfortably on a divan, a small, though walrus-mustached, man in nearly correct dinner clothes. The dinner clothes would have been absolutely correct except that the trousers plainly belonged to a business suit.

“Colonel Barnaby?” he said, by way of getting in the first shot, and bowed.

“Middleton?” Colonel Barnaby also bowed, but much lower than Townsend who, as he saw the depth of the bow, could already feel that bullet searing his skin.

“Yes,” said Townsend.

“Son,” said Colonel Barnaby astonishingly, “Ah’m proud to know you!”

Middleton forced a smile. He wasn’t prepared for this son stuff.

“I’m proud to know *you*, sir,” he said, feeling this was safe to say to practically anyone.

“If your boy had had enough weight in his whip,” the Colonel went on, “you, suh, would have won a Kentucky Derby!”

“Hungh?” said Middleton.

“Certainly!” said Colonel Barnaby. “You-all had the better horse, and then the other jockey wouldn’t have been able to protest.”

“Why on earth wouldn’t he?”

“He’d have been unconscious,” said Colonel Barnaby.

Middleton laughed. He found it impossible to be afraid of anyone who was possessed of such simple, accurate logic. The next instant his

sense of security passed, however, for Barnaby said: "I should shoot you, sir, I should shoot you down like a dawg."

He said this calmly, as a man speaks when he states a simple fact. Townsend winced. He decided to bluff.

"Oh, come," he said. "I wouldn't say that."

"You—" Here Barnaby paused and shook a long finger at Middleton. "You, sir, are not Magnolia's father!"

Middleton laughed again. He couldn't help it. The irrelevancy was too much for him.

"Are you?" he said—then, instantly regretted the words. This was the sort of crack men got lynched for in this part of the world. Surprisingly enough, the Colonel took it quite calmly. In fact it seemed to remind him of something he wanted to be reminded of, for he smiled.

"Well," he said, "strictly speaking, no, but I raised her since she was a pup. Matter of fact, sir, I'm glad you brought that up, because it wasn't Magnolia I was speakin' of."

Here he smiled. His smile, oddly enough, had in it much of the charm of Sally Barnaby's. It was simple and it was unutterably frank. As he smiled he sank to the sofa as though his knees were suddenly tired.

"One of those dizzy spells," he said. Then he straightened and became Kentucky Colonelish again. "I was saying, sir, that you should be shot for running off with my daughter Magnolia, I meant ... I *meant* that you should be shot for running off with my daughter Sally!"

"Oh," said Middleton. "I get it now."

"But instead, sir, instead," here Barnaby rose to his feet again. The feet were teetery, but they held. "Instead, I say, God bless you!"

"Oh, not at all," said Middleton. "A pleasure."

"God bless you!"

"No, really. Glad to have her come along."

Colonel Barnaby stiffened to a terrific straightness. He looked for the moment every inch what he was supposed to, and not at all what he was.

"Dammit, Yankee!" he said, "I'll brook no contradiction. I say ..."

He was interrupted by the small face of Boots O'Connel thrusting itself around a corner of the doorway, shortly followed by Boots herself. She was way out of her world and she was scared, but she had a lot on her mind.

"Mr. Middleton," she said, "you better come with me quick—there's been trouble and—and Bill's tryin' to get Mamby to go into the private car and ..." She ran shy of breath.

Townsend Middleton looked at her. Then he looked at Colonel Barnaby. Then, being a wise young man, he flagged a waiter who was hovering in the background and ordered a drink.

Some few minutes after Boots O'Connel's inaugural and final appearance at the Sefton Club, she and Middleton stepped out of a taxi at the railroad siding where the midnight special to New York waited. The front of the special, where were the Pullmans, was quiet. The rear of the special where were the private cars was not quiet. It was not quiet at all—in fact about it there was the general air one would expect to find around a circus train with half the roustabouts loyal and the other half on militant strike. Bill once again was lined up against The Interests. Assisted by Wee Willie and Paddy, the stable boy, he was boosting Black Mamba from behind as she stood hesitant halfway up an impromptu runway leading into the last car. As Middleton arrived on the scene, Bill, with a final shove, succeeded in doing what it is doubtful if any other man—even Hannibal, the elephant mover—could have done. He got Mamba into the car. Then he turned and glared at his enemies.

"If you boys in de blue suits don't want dis fine horse in dis car, get her out of it." Then, as an afterthought as he mopped a dripping brow: "It'd give me pleasure to see you do it."

Middleton addressed the nearest representative of the railroad.

"Bill drunk again?" he said affably. It seemed to him that affableness was indicated.

The railroader turned to him with a start and said reproachfully, "Oh, Mr. *Middleton!*" He said it with the shocked yet awe-filled voice Rockefeller's secretary might use should he suddenly come upon Rockefeller giving away quarters instead of dimes.

"Is he *that* drunk?" asked Middleton, who knew perfectly well Bill wasn't drunk at all but merely going through one of his more active phases of loyalty.

"No, but you see, Mr. Middleton, we ..." He broke off as he saw two ladies in evening clothes. Middleton nodded.

"I know," he said. "Boots told me. You wouldn't let the horses into their own car because you'd somehow heard I wouldn't be able to pay for it, hadn't you?"

The man nodded.

"It's not my fault," he said. "It's ..."

“Orders,” finished Middleton. He sighed. He’d been half-expecting something like this. He went through life half-expecting these things, and they made him feel sick inside when they happened because he’d been brought up to think of them as dishonorable. “Well,” he laughed. He had enough wine in him so he could make the laugh sound quite real. “What are we going to do about it?”

“I’m sorry, sir, but we’ll just have to unhook that car if we can’t get the horses out of it—and leave it here till we can.”

At this point Topsy Martin, who, having for years been technically divested of honor, didn’t think this sort of happening dishonorable in the least, went to the mat.

“The hell you will!” she said in that ultra-refined voice chorus girls use for squelching—which invariably makes such a honey of a contrast between what they say and the way they say it. It touched the railroader on the raw.

“The hell we won’t!” he said.

Middleton, embarrassed now beyond the point where he could conceal it, gulped and flushed simultaneously, and was a little glad that Boots had gone on into the car to lie to Mamba about how she happened to be there. He thought Boots would probably tell her it was because she’d really won a Derby and that Mamba, the stuck-up babe, would probably believe it.

Then, in the midst of his agony, he felt his arm pressed softly and heard Sally Barnaby’s even softer voice say: “I just love all this, Townsend. It’s so *dramatic*!” and then, with that unerring instinct of Dixie ladies for making themselves seem the one comforting companion in the wide wide world to any man they happen to be standing next to, “I’m *glad* to be here with you—in case you need me.”

He looked down at her. A mangy station lamp was doing all sorts of swell things to her hair: shooting it full of little lights and shimmers. It did things to her face too, although her face was lovely enough not to need much done to it in the way of lighting.

As he looked, Middleton forgot for a second where he was and who he was. He forgot to such an extent that he didn’t even hear the railroader repeat himself to Topsy and didn’t hear Topsy say, “You come along with me, boy, and get your boss, and I’ll get Popsy to tell him on the telephone whether or not that car goes out of here on the special!”—and he didn’t hear her add, as they went off up the platform: “Who do you think runs this railroad anyhow. The *stockholders*? I run it, you Hot Box you—see?”

Townsend Middleton, still looking down at Sally Barnaby, took her hand. He felt, absurdly, as she had intended him to feel, that she should always have been beside him and, what was much more important, that she always should be beside him.

“You’re a sportsman!” he said. It was as though another man had said, “You’re an angel,” for in his lexicon it was the peak compliment. He pressed the hand.

Sally said, “You’re so gallant about—” she gestured toward the loudly commenting crowd—“all this. You’re like Father!”—She saw him wince—“Used to be!”

“Aw,” said Townsend. He was going to deprecate his gallantry and sympathize because Father was like that no more, but Sally cut him short.

“Let’s get inside,” she said. “They *might* hurt you out here, Townsend.”

This, on the face of it, was a purely romantic speech made out of whole cloth. Obviously, there wasn’t anyone in the curious crowd who felt the slightest desire to do damage to Townsend Middleton, but the speech got in its work. He pressed her hand again and, shoving aside some of the too-close curious, led her up the shiny brass steps of the private car.

Daintily the slave maiden stepped onto the auction block, or rear platform, eagerly the child stepped over the polished brass sill into the glittering, champagne-flavored strawberry shortcake from which, her father not making too much trouble, she could eat her way out, into Townsend Middleton’s private car. It was a milestone for both of them, though neither of them knew it. Still hand-in-hand, they laughed as they saw, in the middle of the lounge part of the car, Elvira, Bill, Black Mamba and the Dalmatian, and Boots, each, in his or her own way, engaging in a favorite pastime. Elvira, Black Mamba, and the Dalmatian were munching sugar. Bill was munching aged whisky; and Boots, in an ecstasy of joy at what she considered an eleventh-hour rescue, was practically munching Black Mamba.

"Popsy" having kicked through to his protégé or babe with the authority to let the race horse stay put, the Derby Special pulled out at midnight, complete with private cars but minus some of Middleton's less well-bred guests who had voiced loud and, in the case of the picture actress, coarse comments on their objections to sleeping with—horses. At twelve-fifteen, as the train passed into the open country, Middleton, who had given up all hope now of becoming unemoted and merely wanted to relax, took himself, a bottle of champagne, and a highball glass full of ice to the observation platform. He had settled himself foggily in a camp chair before he realized that Topsy Martin and Sally were sitting together on the opposite side of the little deck. He was so very foggy, what with all that had happened that day, that he wouldn't have noticed their presence even then, but Sally leisurely reached out a hand and rested it on his. He jumped, spilling his drink. Topsy laughed.

"Steady, Yank," she said. "It's only them rebels."

Them rebels laughed too—honeyedly, as became rebels who were swishing through the darkness on observation platforms of private cars. She said, "Topsy's been telling me about you."

"Topsy's a liar," said Middleton.

"As Daniel said when he got into the lyron's den," said Topsy, "I think I'd better get out of here."

"Oh, stick around," said Townsend. He liked Topsy Martin. She was no bother at all and she never got in his hair the way most people did.

"No," said Topsy. "Where do I sleep? With Elvira or Mamby?"

With that she popped into the car, leaving Townsend alone with the Southern girl and the Southern night, and she knew that both of them were oozing romance and that Townsend was, emotionally, not quite himself. In its way it was probably the dirtiest trick she'd ever played on a man. It was like giving a child with a penchant for playing with matches a stick of dynamite. It is certainly not to her credit that, as she went into the car, she chuckled.

Sally Barnaby said, when she and Townsend were alone again with the rushing wind and the darkness, "I think Topsy left us alone together on purpose!"

If Townsend had been in anything like a normal condition he would have spotted this crack for what it was worth and yelled for Bill to chaperone him. He would have realized what many a Mormon has—that two women against one man are utterly unfair odds. But he wasn't in a normal condition, and so instead of realizing that no girl could be so stupid as to say a thing like that innocently, he thought it did a lot towards advancing the coziness of the world in general. He drank deep of his drink and, for the second time that day pressed Sally Barnaby's hand. Sally Barnaby's hand pressed back. Sally Barnaby's chair inched over so that it was close to his. Sally Barnaby said, "You're a darling, with all your other worries—to be so nice to me!"

She almost said. "To *little* me." It would have put the kibosh on the works if she had; Middleton would have waked up. As it was, he merely changed his glass to his right hand leaving his left hand and arm free to drape themselves about Sally Barnaby.

"You're nice to *me*," he said. "You care!"

An instant later he couldn't imagine what had possessed him to say such a thing. It was the sort of stock answer that he despised and that any girl as lovely as Sally must despise too. It was yokelish—the sort of thing the boys who squired her to the Saturday-night dances she'd spoken about would say. For the first time since he'd left the Sefton Club he was beginning to be comfortable again. He was enjoying the night and whirling through the midst of it with this girl. Now, he felt, he'd spoiled it. He hadn't, however, reckoned on the mental processes inherited from her old man which actuated Sally. She gave him a look that he could see even through the cinders was ineffably tender, and said, "I do."

"Why should you?" The champagne was getting in its work now. "We only met—to-day."

His arm held her much closer. He set his drink down so that his right hand could take hers.

"I think I must have waited for to-day always."

"It's been a hellova day," said Middleton, forgetting where he was.

"It's been a wonderful day—for me!" She was, as Topsy Martin had thought, simply oozing romance—soft, gooey, Southern romance. "It's brought me you!"

"And it's cost me seventy-five thousand berries!" said Middleton ungallantly.

"I know what that's like," said Sally. "I don't mind."

Middleton shook his head as though there were clouds before his eyes

he could shake off that way.

“Have you ever lost seventy-five thousand berries? I mean—” He snapped his fingers—“just like that?”

“Yes,” said Sally Barnaby. She hadn’t, but she could see no harm in saying she had. “You see I understand all about how hard things are for you, Townsend. I mean Topsy told me.”

“Topsy told you, eh? You beautiful lady!”

“She told me how foolish and gallant you were—trying to keep on all the people who’d worked for your daddy and your granddaddy when you didn’t have any money at all of your own and never letting on that was the real reason you were in such debt.”

Townsend Middleton had never thought about his chaotic financial condition in quite this way before. He *had* kept on any number of totally useless employees for the simple reason that he couldn’t find it in his heart to fire them. He had tried to live in the same tradition, or on the same standard, as his father; but that was because it was a pleasant standard and of course much the nicest way to live. Lots of his friends had bawled him out for it. Some of them had said he was silly to spend the money to keep the Long Island estate going; other, older friends had told him he was a wastrel, a spendthrift, for doing it. Now this girl saw what must have been in his heart all the time—the sense of the lightness of things, the monument to the family name, the *noblesse oblige*. That was why he’d hocked the inheritance he was to get from his famedly rich uncle with the incorporated blood pressure. That was why Mamby had run in the Derby. *Noblesse oblige!* This girl—this lovely girl of high station, who had fought against the same things as he because of her drunken father, was the first who had ever even guessed (he hadn’t, himself, till she brought it to him). She understood!

He turned his head so he could look down at her as she rested snug as a bug against his shoulder. There was something about the way that head rested against him—something sweet and trusting and cozy that raised in him the team spirit.

He continued for some little time to look at her. Right now Sally Barnaby was the only comforting thing he could see in the whole world. His uncle *was* so *damned* healthy. Sally Barnaby was so *damned* beautiful.

Ridiculous, his having let Topsy get away with asking her to come back on the car with them. Awful, having to have Mamba and Elvira and Pete the Dalmatian there too, because he hadn’t credit enough to have them sent back home the proper way. Horrible, the whole

experience; yet Sally didn't mind. Sally liked him. Maybe Topsy'd been right. Maybe Sally loved him. As he looked at her he thought maybe he loved her and, though the idea would have struck him as absurd a few hours ago, he found himself suddenly hoping quite desperately that she did love him.

"Sally—" His voice was so sentimentally deep he sounded like a plumber in a basement calling to his helper one flight up. "Sally, I love you."

She made no answer. She simply looked at him for one wide-eyed second. Then he kissed her and then she said, after a time, "I love you Towny—terribly."

She didn't love him, she loved the glamour of him. He didn't love her. He loved the comfortable sensation of her—the sweet, stupid sensation of being understood—the warmth of her surrender—the unorthodoxy of their meeting which made it romantic.

Townsend Middleton, who had failed completely in everything,—even in the business of living,—was, at the moment, like a successful man who has worked too hard and cracked under the strain of it. He had become a straw-grasper-at. Sally Barnaby meant comfort and, probably, happiness—at least companionship—for a little while.

"Sally Barnaby," he said, "will you marry me?"

"Oh, Towny!" said Sally Barnaby much as Topsy Martin must once upon a time have said, "Oh, Popsy!" And then, being fundamentally a thoroughly nice person with right ideas about things, "But Towny, maybe you don't really want to marry me. Maybe you're just a little tight or something. I wouldn't dream of marrying you if that was the way it was."

That was the way it was, but Townsend didn't know it. Matter of fact, he wouldn't have admitted it if he had known it. He was that kind of a guy. He freed his hands and shook her very gently.

"Will you marry me? Will you marry me right away?"

"Oh, Towny!"

Her face buried itself on his shoulder. Bill, looking through the door, put on a tough expression, shook his head sadly, and muttered.

"Good night!" he muttered. "After all I can't oney perfect him from some things! Dis is outa my realm!"

He started off, dodging horses as he went; then he turned and looked again. The shapes on the platform were so close he could only see one united shape. Not having been able to overhear the conversation the significance of this was quite lost on him. He slapped the race horse on

the flank as he passed.

“You should see the boss, Mamby!” he said. “*Zowie!*”
Zowie wasn’t the half of it.

They were married, a few hours after the special reached New York, at a little church on upper Broadway where Middleton had been coerced into worship as a child. Mrs. Theodore Ashton stood up with the bride, who was given in marriage by Theodore Ashton, borrowed from the backgammon room at the Union Club for the afternoon. A girl, dug up from somewhere by the minister, played an olio of gush on the organ which, in spite of her trick of getting her feet crossed on the base pedals and then being unable to uncross them, made tears come to Middleton's eyes, because it was the music at his wedding and he took his wedding very, very seriously.

Bill was best man. He didn't quite understand that the duties of a best man are, properly, merely to be present and see that the bridegroom doesn't jump into the potted palms that always surround altars and escape at the eleventh hour, and to turn over the circlet of bondage. Throughout the entire proceeding Bill kept his hand at his billy pocket and glared threateningly at Theodore Ashton, who looked to him like a pretty fly sort of lad.

Sally Barnaby, rapidly becoming Mrs. Townsend Middleton, looked properly starry-eyed and exceedingly happy. To her Middleton was the Prince Charming of all time. If he'd had warts on his nose he still would have been almost a Prince Charming. Being a nice normal attractive-looking young gent *and* standing for what he did he was a super Prince Charming. She couldn't understand why God had been so good to her when her daddy hit the booze so hard. She was in love. As the minister said "man and wife," tears filled her eyes and made them look like violets covered with new dew.

As the minister said, "I ... pronounce you man and wife," Middleton's eyes also filled with tears and he felt very strong and noble and protective. Through his mind there flashed an idea of going to work to provide security for this lovely creature that was now his, in case—just in case—something should skid about that will of his uncle's.

As the minister got off that clincher line, Bill shook his head and knocked his knees together. "Dere goes de Chief!" he muttered to himself. "Tings won't be de same like, now."

As the minister nodded, as much as to say, "I've done it, lad; twenty bucks, please," Middleton took Sally in his arms and, in front of God and the assembled company, kissed her. Then he patted her cheek because he thought in that moment she might feel lonely and friendless and, perhaps, a little afraid, and he wanted her to feel that he would take care of her. Like most American men, in his mind he reversed the marriage ceremony. *He* would comfort *her* and so forth. The gesture was nice—it made everybody feel pleasantly weepy—even Bill, who slapped Middleton on the back and unbent to the extent of holding out a hand to Theodore Ashton and saying, "Congratulations, old man! Congratulations!"

Theodore Ashton looked at him in dismay. He'd met Bill before and hadn't liked him. He was, in fact, a little afraid of him. To be truthful, he was scared pink of him.

"Eh?" he said.

Bill pressed his hand and glared. But he glared with a sort of soft glare now as though sentiment had weakened his normal glare.

"I said congratulations!"

"I know," said Ashton. "I wondered why."

"Hell!" said Bill. "At weddings everybody congratulates everybody. God knows *why*! Dey just do, *see*?"

Townsend Middleton missed this little interchange. He was walking, bride on arm, toward the door of the church. His car was waiting for them there, luggage aboard, ready to whisk them away to Niagara Falls or Westchester or White Sulphur or wherever two socially prominent total strangers who proposed to live together might want to go before letting life and what-not start trying to separate them.

Still in a state of exaltation, he reached the church door, passed through it, and promptly faced seven cameras and a whole host of reporters. He was used to this sort of thing at race tracks. He didn't like it at his wedding. That, in spite of his name, belonged to him, not to the public. The cameras clicked.

"Now kiss her, Mr. Middleton—we got to get one of you kissing her."

He stood straight and stiffened. Sally Barnaby, an almost unbearable happiness surging through her, looked up at him lovingly.

Another reporter urged, "Go on, Towny! This is *news*!"

A sleek, prosperous-looking reporter walked through the photographers and leaned close to him.

"Mr. Middleton, I've got to get your story." He lowered his voice so not more than half the other newspaper men could hear him. "Now I

know you're—shall we say—not too flush right now. My paper's willing to pay—" (the amount he whispered) "for your signed story. What about it? Yes?"

"No," said Middleton.

Suddenly, Sally Barnaby was frightened. She was frightened by the staggering realization of the prominence she had achieved. She clung to his arm.

"Towny, let's go 'way."

He looked down at her and found it awfully nice to have someone clinging to his arm looking to him for protection, and a little shyly realized for the first time that she was his wife. He couldn't, to be sure, offer her what you might call steady protection, but he could protect her from this sensation-hungry mob. He looked at the sleek reporter coldly.

"Will you—gentlemen—please step aside and let Mrs. Middleton and me get to our car?"

They ground their cameras and snapped their cameras and thrust themselves closer. The sleek one said, "You're a fool, Towny, not to co-operate. There may be a day, you know, sometime when ..."

He didn't finish because Middleton lowered his head and one shoulder and, so to speak, bucked the line. The line gave, toppled back upon itself; cameras fell to the pavement. The sleek reporter went down, but even as he fell he was mentally dictating to his secretary: "What can be wrong about Towny Middleton's *sudden* marriage to Sally Barnaby that makes that well-known Rolls-Royceterer ..."

At that point in his mental dictation he lit on the sidewalk and Middleton, dragging Sally by the hand, entered his car. As it started and lost itself in the midtown traffic, they unscrambled themselves from the undignified position in which they had landed aboard, due to the haste of their departure, and realized that now they were alone together for the first time since they'd met—with the exception of that brief hour on the observation platform—and that they were actually married.

The business of going away after the wedding does that to people. Wherever they're going they're going together—openly, publicly together. They have to, although it would be much easier for practically all brides and bridegrooms if they could first go to their separate dens or lairs and then go off together sometime when nobody happened to be noticing them, the way they used to before they were married.

Sally and Townsend, from far corners of the car, looked at one another. They saw one another as complete strangers; attractive strangers whom it would be nice to know better and of whom it would

be nice to see quite a lot. Townsend saw himself too: as a man who had had a reputation for being wild and giddy but who, at heart, wasn't the least bit that way, but who had done a very wild and giddy thing. Sally Barnaby saw herself as Mrs. Townsend Middleton. She liked very much seeing herself as Mrs. Townsend Middleton.

"Towny—where are we going?"

Still thinking quite hard about himself, he answered: "I told Bill to meet us at Briarcliff Manor."

"You told *Bill*!" Sally Barnaby Middleton snapped out of the pleasant little reverie she'd been enjoying, with horror in her eyes. "Is *he*—that *lug* going on—*our*—honeymoon?"

"Well, you see ..." said Townsend. Then he stopped. He simply didn't have the crust to say he'd told Bill to keep himself unobtrusively present to look after any financial difficulties that might arise due to the Derby fiasco. It just somehow wasn't the way a Middleton started off married life. He patted her hand as inspiration came to him.

"I thought," he said softly, "that you and I would be more alone together if Bill was around to bite the ears off reporters and photographers."

This got across like a house afire. Sally melted.

"After all," she said, "I suppose important people *have* to have someone to stand between them and the—the rabble."

It was a fool remark, but satisfied Townsend. He knew that in Sally's eyes Bill had now changed from lug to Captain of the Household Guard and he didn't foresee the complications that were bound to arise since Bill himself couldn't possibly know of his promotion.

■

The first of these unforeseen complications arose almost immediately after the bridal couple's arrival at Briarcliff. They had gone by a circuitous route—through the Park and around the Park, then around the Park again and then up Riverside Drive, all in the most approved manner of starting on wedding voyages.

They had talked little at first, on this journey, being content to sit as close together as the warmth of the day allowed and to dream the homely, sentimental, good lusty dreams honeymooners should. This in the Park. As they started up the Drive, Townsend began to talk. He told her, in fact, all about himself, from boyhood on; and she listened fascinated to his dreams and ambitions which, as such, for a grown man were pretty feeble, but had grand names in them such as Liverpool

Grand National, Derby, Cup Polo Team at Hurlingham, and so forth. By the time they turned off the road and began the long climb up to the hotel, Sally was practically blistering, so warmly loving and prideful were her thoughts.

She continued practically to blister with these loving and prideful thoughts until, amid much managerial bowing, they were ushered into the living room of the bridal suite and she saw the Captain of the Household Guard sitting with his feet on a table guzzling his customary Scotch-and-soda. She stopped blistering and bristled. Bill rose.

"To de bride!" He polished off the last half of his highball. "Everyting's okey dokey, Chief. I give de boys a signed interview before I left de church and dey tink you're at White Sulphur."

Townsend looked at him.

"What else did you say?"

"I said it was a real love match. I said, 'Boys,' I said, 'it's a real love match. Lots of babes have been after de Chief's money but dis babe knew he didn't have none.' Was I right, Towny?"

"Oh God," said Middleton. Sally went quickly into the bedroom. Bill, not getting it, continued.

"I said, 'Dis babe's a real lady. She knew he'd been done out of de cash for de Doyby. She knew he'd toyned down a hunnert g's for de filly because his trainer's kid liked de filly, an' she knew he was flat, an' *still* she married him!' Was I right, Towny?"

"Sure," said Middleton. "That was fine, Bill. That was fine. Thanks. But don't tell me any more."

"Should I go for a walk, perhaps?"

"Yes." Middleton wanted to tell him he should not only go for a walk but should also find a deep quarry pit and then should jump into it. But he didn't. Instead, he went to the bedroom door and knocked.

"Sally?"

"Send him away."

Bill heard this.

"Gosh," he said. "I didn't mean to *intrude*!"

Townsend turned to him.

"Listen, Bill," he said. "This is a honeymoon. For the love of heaven, beat it, will you?"

Bill merely looked hurt and rubbed his knees together and said, "You know me, Chief, I'm your friend—"

"I know," said Townsend.

"You know I wouldn't do nuttin' to spoil our honeymoon."

“SEND HIM AWAY!”

Townsend shrugged his shoulders.

“It looks,” he said, “as though I’d have to struggle along without you on this honeymoon. I’m sorry, Bill.”

“Me too, Chief!” Bill picked up his hat. “I was sorta lookin’ forwards to it. Where should I go?”

“Go to Greenhill—you’ll probably find enough financial trouble there to keep you busy.”

“Okey dokey, Chief.”

“And quit saying that. I hate it.”

“Okay, Chief.”

They shook hands and then Bill, after the manner of Napoleon’s troops bidding their famous farewell, took his leave. When he had gone Townsend went again to the bedroom door.

“Sally—I’ve sent him away.”

There was no answer. He opened the door and went into the room. Sally Barnaby Middleton was lying on the bed quite obviously weeping. She was weeping with those great sobs frequently produced by brides during the first emotional hours of their bridedom. Sally Barnaby Middleton had, as brides do, realized the welter of complications she now had to face. She had realized that she hadn’t married a man, she’d married a mess left by his optimistic sire; that she had to compete with Greenhill and his horses and his trainer and his trainer’s daughter and his No Man for his affection; that the small-scale dodging of creditors she’d been accustomed to in Louisville was a piker game compared to what she’d let herself in for.

For a tiny frightened second, as she heard Middleton come into the room, she wished with all her heart she were home. Then he was sitting beside her and had laid a large hand between her shoulder blades in a firm gesture he thought should be soothing.

“Sally, I’m sorry about the Bill business. I—I didn’t have him here because of reporters. I had him here because I’m darn near flat and he’s so awfully good with—about handling money things.” He took a deep breath, “You see I didn’t want you to bump up against—all the unpleasant part of being married to me—till—” He laughed. “Till we knew each other better.”

She stopped crying. The great Middleton was showing depths of tenderness she hadn’t suspected. He went on.

“You’re in a lousy spot, Sally. I know that—hell.” He said the “hell” conversationally, not as a cuss-word. “But I told you about me and you

didn't seem to mind, and I'm only sorry I was so dumb as to tell Bill to meet us here."

Sally took out the hand that had been beneath her head and with it found his.

"That's all right, Towny."

"Is it? Is it really?"

"Course it's all right. I know you were—flat."

She hadn't *really* even dreamed it. She sat up and looked at him, bright-eyed.

"Will I have to cook and get your meals and things?"

He began to laugh, slowly at first, then heartily.

"Not while I have creditors you won't, Babe!"

"I could, you know. I *would*, Towny."

"Sportsman! Swell small sportsman!"

It began then to seem to both of them much more as a honeymoon should seem. Briarcliff took on some of the attributes of the observation cars of trains rustling through Southern nights in the springtime.

The creditors, each of whom Townsend knew would see to it that he was never poor while his Uncle lived, lest some other creditor might grow wary and thrust him into bankruptcy—so none of them would get anything, might have shed sentimental tears—might even have knocked a little something off their bills—had they been near enough to Briarcliff to feel the sentimental aura that now properly surrounded these two. One creditor (Townsend's tailor, who was a stupidly soulful ass anyway, and had seven children) would likely have offered him a partnership.

To Sally Barnaby, in her new realization and understanding, Middleton had been promoted from the position of Gay Young Wastrel sure to get into the chips sometime to the Last Duke clinging with his teeth to the ancestral bailiwick—and, *ipso facto*, she was promoted to the post of the Last Duke's Duchess. She kind of liked the idea of being the Last Duke's Duchess. She went on liking it until a heavenly untrammelled week had passed. She went on liking it better and better as the honeymoon moved with almost royal spendthriftiness up through the Berkshires; west a little, north, and to Niagara Falls. She liked it until Townsend received a telegram from Bill that made his face go white and struck him, for the moment, dumb, and seemed to make him forget, almost, that she existed in his preparations for hurried departure. Then she worried—as Last Duchesses should.

The telegram was very much to the point. It said, simply:

POP HUNG HIMSELF LAST NIGHT GUY FROM BANK HERE TO TAKE
OVER GREENHILL BOOTS NEAR CRAZY YOU BETTER COME P S ME
I'M NEAR CRAZY TOO

Sally, as Townsend was hurling clothes into his suitcase, picked up the telegram from where he had thrown it. As she read it her face went nearly as white as Middleton's and tears welled slowly into her eyes. It spelled the end of the honeymoon, of course, but she knew it meant much more than that. She knew it meant that life had once again caught up with her. It gave her the sort of chill spiritual mediums feel when once in a great while they see a real ghost. It practically scared the pants off her.

But because Sally was fundamentally Southern with all the Southerner's ability to glide over bumps instead of smacking them head on, the chill didn't last. She got over it as she packed, for although he hadn't said anything about her racing home with him, she hadn't the slightest intention of letting Townsend feel he could face a tough situation without her or of turning him loose to comfort any pansy-eyed stableman's daughter who looked like a woman and dressed like a boy.

As the plane he'd hired dove to its landing at the Long Island airport, she clung to her husband's hand.

"Towny—I am so sorry and—and frightened about everything."

Peering at the ground, looking for his car, he answered over his shoulder.

"I'm sorry too, Sally. It may be—sort of nasty." He turned. "We're coming down out of the clouds now, you see."

"I love you, Towny."

Her hand was pressed violently. So violently it hurt, and she was glad. But she wasn't glad at all when, after they had landed and got into the car, he said, "Poor, poor little Boots! I guess I'll have to adopt her or something. She'd no one but O'Connel—and the horses, poor kid; and it doesn't much look as though there were going to be any horses now."

They fell into silence then, that lasted until they were home. As

silences go, it was a pregnant one. Townsend was deep, deep in gloom. He thought the whole thing was pretty awful and that having the guy from the bank around at such a time was still awfuller. Then, too, he loved Boots. He loved her the way the British love their king, the way he loved his horses and seeing his silks flash by the winning post; the way he loved Greenhill. Boots was as much part of Greenhill as the great rambling house itself. By the time they passed under the colonial arch of the lodgehouse and into the bluestone driveway, he had almost forgotten Sally Barnaby.

By the time they passed under this archway of the lodgehouse Sally Barnaby had, mentally, got her loins girded for battle. She felt a shiver of thrill run down her spine—the way she had when she'd realized the new importance she'd attained after her wedding—when she saw the lodgehouse, and the broad green acres of pastureland spotted with woods that lined the driveway. *This was hers* now. No guy from a bank was going to take it away from her. She'd dreamed too long of something just like this to be willing to see it mist into a memory almost before it had become an actuality. Presently the chauffeur sounded the horn three times, the car swung under a porte-cochère, and Bill bounced from the house and flung open the limousine's door.

“Aw, Chief! I'm some glad you're here!”

He put a welter of feeling into this, that was added to by the worry that lined his big homely face.

“Dey've run me ragged.” He looked slyly over his shoulder. “Say, why'n't you slip in de back door an' go to your private smokeroom, eh, Chief?”

Townsend smiled. He nearly always smiled when he saw Bill laboring under emotional stress. It was like coming upon a child of four grappling with a problem in trigonometry. He helped Sally out and shook his head.

“No, Bill. It's still my house, you know.”

“Okey do—” Bill caught himself. “Okay, Chief.” Then, to Sally, “Hi, Toots!”

Sally gave him a look—a look such that the trigonometric-child expression swarmed back to his face.

In the main hall, as Townsend entered, there was quite a little reception committee waiting for him. There was, as advertised, Ranson of the bank, there was Buel the butler, looking sorrier than most butlers can look, there was the feed-and-seed man from whom Towny bought most of his horse provender; there was a fat little man in pince-nez—

Whitsun, the tailor; there was, looking like a proud ship in the midst of a storm, Mrs. Ashton; and, over by one wall looking like something the tide had washed up, Mr. Ashton.

Behind this group, whoever had charge of the reception committee—probably either Mrs. Ashton or Bill—had corralled a complete set of lesser creditors—namely, the butcher, the grocer, a couple of department-store credit men, three jewelers, a dressmaker (who should have had better taste than to close in at such a time), and behind these—pressed against the French windows on the lawn side of the hall—six process-servers.

Even though he had to receive them, under the circumstances, Bill would never let process-servers into the front row of creditors. It simply was not in his code.

Townsend handed his hat to Buel and said, "It's a damned shame, this!" He gestured toward the crowd of people, all of whom had been awed into silence by the actual appearance right smack in their midst of the ogre they were seeking. He managed a grin. "Must make you feel like a fool. I'm awfully sorry about it, really."

Buel, who had paddled Townsend in his youth for throwing rocks at him, blinked—his eyes were full of tears, so he had to blink—and said, "It would have killed your father, sir, if he could see this!"

Townsend looked him full in the blinking eyes. He said, "Father's not having seen this has damn near killed me. It was bound to happen—I just didn't know it was coming—right now."

Townsend Middleton straightened and then he looked at these people, one by one, for a long time. He saw, as he looked at them, all sorts of things besides the people themselves. He didn't like the things he saw, but particularly he didn't like these people. He owed them money and he'd pay them money—the money he owed—in time; but they had no business coming here now—just because Pop O'Connel had lost his nerve and gone to join Domino and Troublemaker and Sysonby and all the other great horses he'd always talked of. They had no right here anyway!

Townsend Middleton looked at them. He clenched his fists in hate: in hate of them—in hate of the situation he'd been born into, that could make this happen to him. Then he got himself under control and remembered that there was more than hate mixed up in this. He turned to Mrs. Ashton and spoke as softly and as calmly as though he were sitting next to her at dinner.

"Sybil, show Sally where she lives, will you? This is sort of—sort of

messy for her.” Then he raised his voice: “BILL!”

“Right wit you, Chief!”

Bill mushroomed up beside him.

“Bill, throw these swine out and the *hell* with the consequences!”

Bill knew he didn’t mean the Ashtons or any of the household people. A broad grin spread over his features. He unbuttoned his coat and hitched up his belt and rubbed his hands together and started for the group of process-servers.

In a moment or so the hall was quite empty. Townsend turned to Ashton.

“What happened, Peter?”

Ashton, who always felt much more at ease when Bill was non-present, lighted a cigarette and puffed on it with all the luxuriance of a mystery story hero when the villain of the piece had spared him.

“*What’s happened, Peter?* I mean here. What happened to O’Connel—why were these lice hanging around? Where’s Boots, Peter? This is ghastly for her.”

Ashton shuddered.

He said, “Oh, perfectly frightful.”

“Where is she, Peter?”

“In their cottage—alone—didn’t seem to want anyone around. We buried Pop this morning—it was quick I know, but Sybil and Bill thought it best.”

Townsend nodded. Then he went across the hall and out onto the lawn and over it to a wood where there was a tiny path that led to the stables. He felt frightfully about the whole thing, yet he didn’t see what he could have done to prevent it. He thought perhaps, though, he could do something for Boots to make up to her for the extreme misfortune of having been born with her fortunes linked to his own. He was a man. As a man, he was supposed to bump the bumps—to have, and to stand up under, misfortune. Boots was a little girl. It wasn’t fair.

She wasn’t at the cottage—he hadn’t really thought she would be; so he went on to the stables, the great Greenhill Stables with its indoor exercise track and its sweet smell of fresh straw and bran and alfalfa and crushed oats. He walked slowly by the rows of boxstalls, some occupied, but most of them empty now. Occasionally a head thrust out and soft lips whickered at him. Presently he came to the corner box, bigger than the others, reserved for the current champion—like a star’s dressing room. He stopped a few paces off.

“Boots.” He called softly. “Boots, it’s Townsend Middleton.”

There was no answer, but he thought he heard a stifled sob. In the half-darkness, he heard Black Mamba stir in the box and saw her head thrust over and heard her blow at him through her nose and whicker. He went to the box and opened the half-door and went inside. Then, in the corner of the stall, by the manger, he saw Boots. She was dressed as she had been at the Derby, in the battered riding things. She was sitting on the straw under the manger and her head was bowed on her knees. She was weeping her soul out to the only two living creatures she had left there to love, Mamba and Pete, the Dalmatian dog, who lay sprawled ungracefully in her lap.

“Boots, it’s Townsend Middleton.” He knelt beside her and laid a hand gently on her shoulder. “I want to help you, Boots.”

She raised her head then and looked at him, though she couldn’t see him very well, what with her tears and the darkness. But he could see her and he could see how she was looking at him and it chilled him.

“You!” she said. “You want to help me. You wasted everything and it killed my father and *you* want to help me!”

Townsend knew this was almost, but not quite, true. He knew too that he would never be able to help her if he let her go on feeling that way about him, so what he said wasn’t meant as a rebuke, but as an explanation. He said, “Remember, Boots, I tossed a hundred thousand dollars out the window when I didn’t sell Mamby—just because you didn’t want me to.”

This stung her.

“I could kill you for doing that. It’s what killed Pop.”

Middleton got to his feet and walked to the door.

“I’m sorry you feel like that,” he said, “because I needed that money more than I’ve ever needed anything in my life.”

He went out into the passage. He had walked almost ten paces before she caught him up and in a fresh and awful paroxysm of weeping, flung herself about him.

“I didn’t mean it, Mr. Middleton. I didn’t mean it. Don’t think of me like that. It’s just I’m so damned bloody lonely and unhappy I don’t know what I’m saying right.”

She clung to him then, fiercely, shaking with all the grief of all the Irish, forever, surging through her. He held her and patted her back and then when she was quieter, he said, “I think they’re going to take Greenhill away from us, Boots.”

“Oh, *sir!*”

He nodded.

"I came here to tell you I'm giving Black Mamba to you, Boots." He saw a white shape at his feet. "And Pete. They're both yours, really anyway."

"But I *couldn't*!" She stopped crying instantly as a child does when it sees the stick of candy that is rainbow's end being handed it.

"You'd better take them—before the bank does." He managed a laugh. "I'd so much rather you had them than they."

"Oh, *sir*!" Tears came again now, but they were of a different sort. Still with his arm around her he led her from the stable.

"We'll have a talk with Mrs. Ashton," he said, "and see what we can work out about you and your racing stable."

Valerie Boots O'Connel loved horses even as her father. She'd got it from him, so she can't be blamed, really, for being a little happy through her grief; nor for feeling that the man who was undoubtedly responsible for his death wasn't such a bad *shaughran* at that.

Back at the house, Townsend immediately took Bill and Mrs. Ashton and Boots to his private smoking room or office. Then he drew up a contract—one of those “For a dollar and other valuable consideration” contracts—making the filly over to Valerie O’Connel. When it was signed and witnessed he handed it to her and said, “I want you to stay here at Greenhill, Boots, as long as we can hang onto it.”

Boots looked at him very steadily. Her excitement during the past few minutes had brought back all her customary composure, but it had done more than that too: it had brought sudden light to her eyes. Townsend thought she looked really quite beautiful, yellow turtle-neck sweater and all. Sally would have thought she looked hoydenish.

“I can’t thank you, Mr. Middleton.”

Suddenly, something in Townsend snapped. He had been more upset the past few hours than he knew. The future looked so utterly dismal, the idea of losing Greenhill, O’Connel’s death, those horrible smirking people yelling for money, had made him lonely.

“Boots,” he said, “for the love of heaven don’t go on calling me Mr. Middleton. After all you’re the only one here who *really* belongs to the place now—you and I.”

He looked away out of the window where the dusk was heavy. Mrs. Ashton and Boots looked away too. Bill didn’t. Instead he slapped Townsend on the back and said: “I got it! She can call you Chief! Like I do! Say, there’s an idea for you, solves every little thing!”

“Bill, you’re wonderful,” said Sybil Ashton. She meant it and she didn’t.

“Aw, shoot,” said Bill, batting his knees together. “I ain’t so much!”

“Aw shoot, yourself; you are too!” said Sybil Ashton. “You *know* you think you are, Bill.”

“Well, maybe.”

“Maybe nothing. You think you’re the snappiest thing that ever came down the pike. Don’t you, Bill?”

Sybil Ashton was trying to talk Townsend out of that window-staring state. That she was talking to him through Bill was simply her way.

“Aw shoot,” said Bill again. “I know I dress snappy—that’s all.”

Boots cut in.

"He's been swell to *me*, Mrs. Ashton. I don't know what I'd have done without him—and you."

"Nuts," said Mrs. Ashton. "Bill's the local Rock of Gib—I know that."

"I ain't!" said Bill. "I definitely ain't. Look here, Mrs. Ashton, I know I ain't pretty, but you shouldn't say things like that."

Townsend turned from the window. There suddenly was a sort of horror-stricken look about him.

"My God!" he said, "I'd forgotten I was married!"

"Why not?" said Bill. "You ain't been married long enough for it to hurt."

Sybil Ashton thought quite hard, but didn't say anything. Boots thought hard too. She thought: "Then it can't mean much to him—she just grabbed him when he was feeling lousy, the bitch—poor Townsend Middleton!" She always thought of him as Townsend Middleton rather than Townsend or Mr. Middleton.

"I darn well should have told Sally I was giving away the filly."

"Yes," said Sybil. "You should."

Boots' heart dropped, but she had been schooled right in sportsmanship. She held out the paper Townsend had given her.

"You can take her back, sir, if you want. I—I won't mind."

Townsend smiled at her. He had seen the light die out of her eyes and her full lips droop at their corners. He shook his head.

"Oh, no," he said. "She's yours." He turned to Mrs. Ashton. "Sybil, square me with Sally, will you? Tell her—tell her anything."

Again Bill sprang into the breech.

"I'll square it, Chief. I'll tell her you just forgot an'—"

"I said you were wonderful, Bill, but I never dreamed you were that wonderful."

None of them noticed that Sally had, just a moment before that, stepped into the room, until she said, over-softly, "Just what did you forget to tell me, Towny?"

Since none had seen her, none knew how much she had overheard and all were most embarrassed. Bill did what he thought of as rallying to the rescue. He said, "It wasn't nothin' much; just that he'd forgot to tell you he was givin' de Mamba filly to Boots."

Sally Middleton looked as though someone had slapped her face.

"Nothing—much!" she threw a quick glare at Boots, then turned to Townsend. "But she's worth a hundred thousand dollars, Towny. You can't. You-all simply can't do that—now."

Boots crossed to her and laid a tentative hand on Sally's forearm as a child grabs at a grown woman's dress to attract attention.

"But Mrs. Middleton, you don't understand."

"Maybe I do," said Sally.

"Oh no, because you'd understand if you understood."

This speech was perfectly sound logic, but to Sally it sounded like gibberish. To Bill it was perfectly sound logic. He gestured.

"You see?" he said, "dat's all dere is to it—nuttin'."

Townsend crossed to her now.

"Sally *darling*," he began, but she shut him off.

"I don't want to speak to you, Towny—I don't want to speak to you *a-tall*!"

She turned with sweeping dignity, that dignity all Southern ladies seem in some miraculous way to have inherited from Lord Baltimore (who must have been quite a traveler) and dished out an exit line.

"You can find me in my room, Townsend, when you're quite finished."

With that she was gone. She left behind her a thick silence. It is always so hard to think of anything to say when one has the bad luck to be present at the primary ticking off of a bridegroom by his bride.

Townsend started to follow her, but Sybil Ashton laid a hand on him and said, "Steady, boy, don't be an ass." Then Bill said, "Cheez! It's on!"

Boots said, "Gee, I'm sorry, sir! Won't you take Mamby back?"

Townsend snapped around.

"Shut up on that," he said, "and for the love of God stop calling me 'sir.' I can't stand it!" Then he got control of himself. "I'm sorry, Boots. I—I didn't mean to swear at you." He smiled a crooked smile. "You know I didn't—don't you?"

"I'm used to swearing, Chief. I expect I'd—miss it if I wasn't to hear it—any more. Pop *always* ..."

Boots began to cry again. Bill and Townsend both immediately looked as though they were going to cry too. Sybil Ashton, who, in spite of the fact that she had never been willing to admit that chorus girls and railroad presidents mingle, was quite wise about many things, took a hand.

"Look here, youngish Boots," she said. "Suppose you and I go to the library and figure out what you're going to do with Mamba."

Boots, doing some quick sob-stifling because she realized it wasn't sporting to sob when one's friends were in trouble, followed Sybil Ashton. As the door closed behind them Bill turned to Townsend.

"Looky, Chief," he said. "I knows you wants to go and square it wid Tootsy, but you gotta see dese creditors. You just *gotta*. Dey've got *me* worn out."

"Right."

Bill went to call them. Townsend started looking out of the window again. He had, naturally, a tremendous urge to go quickly upstairs and make Sally know there was nothing wrong between them. But the urge was tempered by an anger—a slight anger that was growing—and a sense of injustice. Sally had had no right to act like that in front of people, regardless of what she thought. This was an emergency, an acute emergency, and she knew it. It was up to her to stand by him the way she had when he'd run into that little difficulty with the railroad people in Louisville. She'd stood by swell then. Anything he'd done she would have thought was swell.

But that, for Sally, hadn't been an emergency. It was just a Saturday-night party that was one hell of a lot more exciting than the others she had known. That had been entirely his emergency, not partly hers as this one was. Townsend Middleton didn't like the idea of thinking such thoughts about his wife so soon after his marriage, but he was man enough to admit to himself that he was thinking them. He heard the door open and swung back to the room. Bill was showing in Ranson of the bank—Ranson, whose bank held the mortgages on Greenhill ... Ranson who was going to take Greenhill from him....

With a long sigh he turned, started to greet the man; then, as he was halfway across the room, the telephone on the desk tinkled. With a gesture of apology he answered it, half-heartedly, simply because it was ringing and not because he hoped anyone he might want to talk to would be on the other end of the line.

"Hello." His "hello" was weary.

"Hey, Buttercup, this is Topsy Wopsy—I hear you're in a jam."

"Hello, Tops. I am—*et comment!*"

"Popsy Wopsy an' I'll fix it. Stall till we get there, see?"

"No," said Middleton.

"Your unkie's blood pressure's way up—I've sold Popsy some shares. Hold the fort, Towny!" Her voice grew suddenly dead serious. "Please, Towny—hold the fort."

Townsend really had only the faintest idea what she was talking about. He was far too upset to be able intelligently to understand Topsy Martin's language, but he knew Topsy liked him with all the grand, full, thoughtless liking that he felt for her. He was glad she'd called him.

“Sure, Tops,” he said. “I’ll hold the fort.”

From across the room Ranson looked at him and furrowed his eyebrows. Ranson, the ghoul, didn’t like the sound of it.

Townsend's method of holding the fort was wonderfully simple. When Ranson said, "I'm afraid, Mr. Middleton, we'll have to foreclose on Greenhill," he said, "Why of course you will, but you can't go around foreclosing at this time of day. Have a drink."

When Ranson, after sipping part of his drink, said "I've brought some papers for you to sign," and reached in his pocket and produced them, Townsend said, "What's the good my signing papers when you've just told me my signature's practically worthless?"

Ranson had not come there to joke. He never went anywhere to joke, for that matter, and he wouldn't have recognized a joke if it came up and bit him. He lost his temper.

"We've fooled with you long enough, Mr. Middleton."

"Then why make bad jokes about my signing things?"

"I am not making jokes, sir!"

"Sure you are; that's a swell joke you made."

"To-morrow the sheriff will be here."

"He's a friend of mine," said Townsend. "I helped elect him."

"You *what*?"

"Sure, I loaned him the money for his campaign—just in case."

He laughed.

"Then," said Ranson, with a great air of triumph, "his duty when he comes here to-morrow to seize this property will be a painful one."

Townsend smiled. He really smiled. The idea of Cletus Brown seizing Greenhill was pretty priceless. He shook his head.

"Give you seven to five he doesn't come."

"And why shouldn't he? He's got to when I show him my papers."

"He won't see your papers," said Townsend, "because he'll be miles away from here. I'll tell him to be."

"Oh my God!" said Ranson, and then, more rationally, "Look here, Middleton, you—"

Townsend held up his hand.

"*Mister* Middleton, please."

"*Mister* Middleton—you can't stall me."

Townsend grinned at him.

"But don't you see, Ranson, that's just exactly what I'm doing?"

"You—"

"I've got to, Ranson." He smiled again. "You see, a rescue expedition is on its way here right now. I've simply got to stall you till it gets here."

"Who'd rescue *you*—at this point?"

"Oh, a fella called Popsy."

"Popsy!"

"Sure, Popsy. Topsy calls him Popsy—bet you can't say that when you've finished your highball. I mean twenty times. You're a clumsy egg; bet you twenty berries you can't!"

"Don't be an ass! I'm not here to play games!"

"Now Ranson, you're in a very sporting section of the country right now—I've offered to make you a wager, don't tell me you're afraid to accept it, Bill here'll hold the stakes."

Bill, who had been hovering near the door stuffing bits of paper into the keyhole in case any of the other creditors might be trying to listen, came forward.

"Okey dokey, Chief! I'll lay you a side bet of five at dem odds dat he can."

"You're on, Bill!" They shook. "Well, what about it, Ranson? Are you a sporting man or are you just a bluff?"

Ranson, for an instant, looked like a rabbit caught in a trap. He didn't know whether he'd make himself more ridiculous by accepting or by refusing the challenge. He had never been in a position like this before. He did get, though, a faint, a very faint, glow from the fact that Bill, whom he had grown to hate in the past day or so, wanted to back him. He tossed off the rest of his highball and found courage to decide.

Slowly he hauled or, rather, fished, two ten dollar bills from his pocket and handed them to Bill. Then, even more slowly and with deadly earnestness, he began:

"Topsy—calls him—Popsy. Topsy calls him Popsy. Topsy calls him Popsy, Topsy calls ..."

Bill stopped him.

"It ain't fair to de chief," he said, "for you to do it so slow. I'm bettin' on you an' even I admit dat. You gotta jazz it."

Ranson, who at this point was so anxious to win the twenty he had no idea at all that he might possibly be making a fool of himself, said, "I suggest you time me then. I know now I can do it—say we make the wager that I can do it in thirty seconds?" He added, as a sort of guess—that'll-show-you-whether-I'm-a-sporting-man-or-not gesture, "Just to

make it more sporting.”

Bill snapped out his stopwatch.

“Go!”

He clicked the button. Ranson began spouting that Topsy called him Popsy. He unquestionably spouted that Topsy called him Popsy accurately twenty times incredibly swiftly. As he finished, Bill clicked his watch again and shouted, “Twenty-two and two-fifths—flat! Attaboy! Ranson, of the Hanoverian Trust Company, wins—under wraps!”

Ranson, for a man who had just finished saying what he had just finished saying, addressed Middleton with an amazing dignity.

“There!” he said. “That’ll show you! My twenty, please—*and* the other twenty.”

Bill handed over the money. Ranson, as he took it, almost strutted.

“Now, about those papers ...”

Middleton shook his head and grinned. He said, “In about ten minutes a gentleman named Humber, president of the B. P. and E. Railroad, will be here. I want you to see him.”

Ranson took it big.

“Not Joshua Humber!”

“Some people call him that,” said Townsend, edging toward the door. “But I notice you call him Popsy. At least you told me a minute ago that was what Topsy calls him.”

He bowed. Almost before Bill had burst into his great guffaw, Townsend was out of the room and on his way to Sally.

Sally had been waiting for him for nearly an hour. During the hour her emotions had run their gamut; but towards the end of the hour what passed for her intelligence began to work, so that by the time Towny knocked on her door she had every intention of being pacified, but no intention at all of being pacified without a struggle. The struggle was too trite to be worthy of record. The end of the struggle was too sloppy to be worthy of it; what is worthy of it is the fact that neither participant was entirely sincere.

Townsend, because he'd been so upset by the real trouble at Greenhill and by her snippity attitude, was half in love with her, half peeved at her. Sally was half in love with him and wholly in love with the idea of making it perfectly definite she was mistress of Greenhill and Townsend's first consideration. The first, she was. The second she wasn't. Towny didn't let her find this out. He kept right on with his pacification until a tremendous pounding on the door announced Topsy Martin. The pounding was accompanied by a shout.

"Hey, buttercup, get out of the hay; you're on your way to a conference."

Townsend turned to Sally.

"Fix your face," he said. "The angel of mercy's here."

Sally smiled at him. She thought it was awfully nice to have a husband who could produce millionaires out of a hat just like that.

"I'll be right down, Towny."

"Hi, *Buttercup*!"

Towny, hoping Sally wouldn't get any absurd impressions of intimacy from Topsy's nickname for him, sped to greet her. As soon as he stepped into the hall, quickly closing the door, Topsy wrapped herself about him and gave him an enormous kiss.

"Oh, Towny, I'm so sorry about your mess!"

He unwound her from his person.

"Hey," he said, "I'm married now—lay off, will you?"

"No," said Topsy. She kissed him again. Then she stood back and looked him over from head to foot. "You don't look any different. Are you, Towny?"

"Yes," he said.

She squinted her eyes.

"The hell you are. I know. I can tell from looking. You're not in love with her."

"Topsy," he took both her hands. "You're swell to bring Humber down here. How did you know they were swiping the place?"

"Bill called me."

"How did you work it with him?"

"Like I told you. I sold him a thousand shares in your uncle's blood pressure at fifty dollars a share. You remember, in the game we used to play at Saratoga, where you'd give us all so many shares at such and such a price and then you'd telephone the old bastard's doctor and get his latest reading and the one whose price was nearest the blood pressure won? Well, you always said I had a thousand shares. I sold them to Popsy, that's all."

"I've got to thank him—right away."

"I thanked him," said Topsy. A funny look came into her eyes. "I thanked him a lot." She paused. "He wants to marry me, Towny."

"Oh, swell!"

"Not swell. I won't do it."

"You're a fool."

She shook her head very slowly.

"No," she said, "I'm not a fool. Being a chorus girl, I sort of glorify him now. Being a chorus girl, if I let a railroad president marry me I'd just make him look ridiculous. Tough, but that's how it is."

"You're too darn noble."

"No, I'm not. I sort of love him and he loves me. He wouldn't even like me, the other way."

He kissed her then, brother-fashion.

"Let's go down, Tops, and confer."

"Sure,"—they started downstairs—"but you won't find anything to do. Popsy's a bearcat as a conferer. It's his life."

Sally joined them on the stairs and greeted Topsy as though she'd known her always.

"Darling! How nice of you to come all the way out here to our house and see us."

Topsy handed Townsend the wink. Sally went on.

"Isn't it silly—this ridiculous mess Townsend's in?"

"Which mess?" said Topsy. It went over Sally's head.

"Why, the one you and Mr. Humber are helping him out of, of

course.”

“Somebody has to,” said Topsy. “He’s a nice guy but dumb.”

“Sally doesn’t think so,” said Townsend.

“Sally does,” said Sally. She thrust her arm through his. “Sally thinks he’s awfully nice.”

“Three rousing cheers,” said Topsy.

They went into the den. The scene there was quite different from what it had been when Townsend left it. Ranson had assumed the grovel, or unctuous, expression; Bill, so relieved to be with someone who wanted to give money to Greenhill instead of to take it away, could hardly contain himself. Behind the desk sat Joshua Humber, tycoon; fifty-odd, gray, lean and hard-faced. But as soon as they entered he stopped looking hard-faced and smiled.

“I’ve drawn up sort of a document,” he said. “I don’t think my partners would approve of it, but secretly *I* think it’s quite—snappy.”

Townsend said, “Hello, Josh.” He’d known Humber ever since he’d started moving through the bright white lights of Broadway. “This is—pretty damn swell of you.” He suddenly snapped his fingers again as though he’d forgotten something, stepped back and said, “By the way, this is Mrs. Middleton.”

“Oh, I’m so glad to meet you,” said Humber.

“Let’s see this document, Popsy,” said Topsy.

Humber winced at the name. But he didn’t wince anything like as much as Ranson. He handed Topsy a sheet of paper which she and Towny and Sally read together:

I hereby acknowledge receipt of one thousand (1,000) shares of Morton Middleton’s Blood Pressure which I have purchased from Winifred Martin at fifty (50) dollars per share, the money to be deposited to the credit of Townsend Middleton at the Hanoverian Bank and Trust Company and to be paid by him to her with interest at six per centum (6%) upon liquidation of the above-mentioned Morton Middleton’s Blood Pressure or upon demand.

L S (*Signed*) JOSHUA HUMBER.

Townsend Middleton’s acceptance of the above transaction acknowledged:

L S _____.

Townsend looked up at Topsy and grinned. The idea of the president

of one of the greatest railroads in the country signing a thing like that delighted him. He said, "Tops, it's really *your* money. You're saving Greenhill, but do you know, I feel positively kept?"

Topsy grinned back at him.

"You know," she said, "oddly enough, so do I!"

Sally, being very chatelaine, crossed to the desk.

"Mr. Humber," she said, her voice dripping roses and moonlight and other Southern props all over the lot, "I can't thank you enough for helping Townsend!"

"He's foursquare!" said Bill. "Foursquare and a yard wide!"

Humber looked at him, puzzled. Topsy patted Bill's arm and said, "There, there, it's all right, handsome." Then to Townsend, "Sign it, you mug, it saves the farm—and a little more."

Townsend signed and gave the paper to Humber who promptly gave it to Sally. Then Townsend grinned again.

"Tops," he said, "I hope you and Josh will stay to dinner."

"Mr. Humber, you just must!" said Sally, getting some chatelaining in quick before it would be too late.

"I think you'll find you and Topsy have some pretty swell champagne laid down here, Josh," said Townsend. "Maybe you own some horses and things too."

The business man in Humber fought its way to the surface.

"Black Mamba part of the place?"

Townsend shook his head.

"No," he said. "When I thought the place was going I gave her to Boots O'Connel."

Towny shouldn't have said this. He should have waited until Sally said, as it was on her lips to say, "We've given Black Mamba to the trainer's little girl." But he did say it and Sally's face froze.

Humber said, "Nice gesture, Middleton. What'll she do with her?"

"Race her—Sybil Ashton's talking to her about it now."

"But Bill told me O'Connel didn't leave a nickel."

"Oh, I'll take care of—" He stopped. All his life, until a few hours ago, Townsend had been a rich man. Whether he happened to have any cash around or not made no difference. He had credit, hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of credit. It was as natural to him to say, "Oh, I'll take care of it," as it was for him to flip a quarter to a cigarette girl. Now he realized that this was the sort of remark an inmate of an asylum who thought he was Napoleon might make.

"But," said Humber, "you—"

He stopped because the door to the room opened and Buel entered.

"Mr. Townsend," he said. "The—persons—are getting a little violent, sir. *Won't* you speak to them?"

"But what'll I say to them, Buel?"

Sally put her arm through his again.

"Towny, tell them Mr. Humber's here and you can't be disturbed."

Towny patted her on the back.

"Sheer genius," he said. "That'll hold 'em. Go on, Buel."

The butler withdrew. As he did so the telephone on the desk tinkled. Bill answered it. Everyone was silent, ostensibly out of politeness but really because everyone is always silent when somebody in the room is telephoning, so they may be able to pick up a nifty tidbit they're not supposed to hear.

"Naw, you can't talk to him!"

He started to put down the phone. Stopped.

"Whassat?"

He gulped as though an emotion far too great for him to control suddenly possessed him.

"Okay, okay, I'll tell him!" He slammed down the instrument and looked at Townsend. "It's happened!" he said. Then, mysteriously, he took off his coat and began to roll up his sleeves, the while an expression of savage anticipation lighted his face, or puss. "Lemme-at-em!"

He strode toward the door, the others too confounded by his sudden lapse, so to speak, to talk. Just as he got to it Topsy Martin found voice.

"Hi!" she cried. "*What's happened?*"

"His rich uncle!" Bill stopped and gestured. "At de age of ninety-eight, never having give de Chief a nickel in his life, finally agreed to pass away. Lemme-at-em!"

He shot through the door. No one in the room he left knew quite what to do. They couldn't be sorry; the old skinflint had been practically in a coma for years. They couldn't congratulate Townsend. So they just looked at one another—except for Townsend, who looked out of the window again. He could see practically nothing there with his eyes because it was quite dark. But in his mind he could see the whole estate and all the beauty of it and Boots and O'Connel and the horses and most of his own life and the horribleness of the past few months. Presently he turned from the window.

"I hate," he said, "profiting by anyone's death."

Topsy Martin answered him.

“Don’t worry too much about it,” she said, “until you do.” She laughed. “Let Bill’s friends with the blue papers do the worrying.”

Sally came to him.

“I know how you feel, honey—I’ll take everyone in the other room. I feel awfully about it too.”

As they filed out and he stood by the desk the sham of her nearly nauseated him.

For the week following, the feeble passing of Uncle Morton's affairs at Greenhill progressed so smoothly that to anyone at all versed in the perversity of nature it would have been perfectly obvious Things were going to happen.

Boots, at Towny's insistence, vacated the cottage and came to live in the big house. Sally insisted on this too (after Towny'd begun to insist on it). Sally, by way of getting even with Towny for asking her to live at the house, carried the thing further with her insisting, and insisted that Boots should feed with them. She did this because in her heart she felt Boots was an enemy and in her heart she felt that Boots, having been brought up in that strange class between servant and friend,—the class in which the men are called Mister by their employers,—would be horribly embarrassed and show herself gauche and foolish and so would cease to be any sort of a menace at all. Sally erred.

She erred particularly because, on the Saturday following Boots' transition, she invited the Ashtons to dinner and, the Ashtons being the Ashtons, she assumed they'd dress and so turned herself out in a little Chanel number with a train. Ashton appeared in flannels and a yachting coat; Mrs. Ashton and Boots, in coolish linen dresses.

The dinner from Sally's point of view was not a startling success. As the savories were passed she tried to start what she thought would be a properly social conversation by saying to Sybil Ashton, "My dear, I've been having such a time getting things straightened out here! I mean the servants and everything," she amplified. "It was easy to see there hadn't been a woman in this house in years and years!"

Peter Ashton guffawed in his napkin. Sybil gave him a look that turned the guffaw to a choke and Middleton blushed. Sally's statement was, to put it mildly, inaccurate.

Boots, seeing Towny's blush, sensed what had happened. She didn't like to see him uncomfortable when he'd been so kind to her. She said, "But Mr. Middleton—I mean Chief's—had lots of women here."

"Ouch!" said Sybil Ashton.

"Some were nice," said Boots. "Some weren't."

"Boots!" said Townsend, reprovingly.

"Oh, they were all plenty pretty," said Boots. "I didn't mean they weren't that."

Then Ashton, whose ancestors had been intimates of Lord Chesterfield and Sir Walter Raleigh, strangled his choke and came out of his napkin to the rescue.

"I say," he said, "I say, Boots, what've you done with the Mamba filly?"

"She's being kept fit," said Boots. "I've got her down with Frayling's string at Belmont." Her eyes grew bright. "I gallop her myself."

For just an instant Sally Barnaby Middleton was surprised out of her social paralysis caused by having the Ashtons dining with her at Greenhill. She said, "Do you mean you actually *ride* that *race* horse?"

Boots looked up at her and smiled.

"I always did," she said. "I galloped her for months before her Derby."

Of course Boots shouldn't have said "her Derby" because legally or technically it wasn't hers—she was disqualified. Boots went on.

"You see she goes quieter for me than for any of the boys." She raised her hand in a self-deprecating gesture. "Oh, I know it's sissy of her, but there it is anyhow."

Middleton, forgetting the social *contretemps* of a moment before, broke in, snapping his fingers as though he'd forgotten something.

"Good Lord, Boots—in that contract I didn't give you Elvira! Will Mamby work without him?"

Now Boots flushed. She flushed so crimson that everyone there except Sally, who hadn't any idea at all what the conversation was about, laughed. Boots was hideously, horribly embarrassed. She came out of her embarrassment exactly as her father would have.

She said, "I'm sorry, sir," and the brogue came in strong on her now. "If you'd bothered to be around the stables this past week you'd have known." She paused and hung her head. "I took him too, sir."

"Oh, swell!" said Towny. "It was awfully stupid of me not to think of including Elvira."

Sally Barnaby Middleton felt she had been left out of things long enough. As the soup arrived she leaned confidentially toward Peter Ashton and said, "Mr. Ashton, I don't *really* understand about all this horse business—do talk to me about something I *do* understand, Mr. Ashton."

Peter Ashton lowered his soup spoon and looked into Sally Barnaby's eyes. He found there things that made him forget all about soup, and he

was a man who really liked soup. He swallowed quickly.

"Oh, call me Peter." Then, leaning towards her with equal confidentialness, "I *hate* horses." He wiped his mustache. "One of Sybil's bit me—last time we were at the track." He seemed to go through a sort of mental struggle as though he were seeking the *mot juste*. Then, "I've got it," he said. "We'll talk about you!"

That was all right with Sally. They talked about her at some length for some time while Boots and Sybil Ashton and Towny merrily prattled on about horseflesh. The more Boots talked the more pleased with her Towny became. She had an instinctive social poise, so that she didn't seem the least out of place there. With dessert, he shoved back his chair and contemplated his home table with something like pleasure for the first time since marriage had overtaken him. He'd had a good meal accompanied by good solid horse talk in the place of the flibbertigibbet remarks that constituted Sally's table conversation. Also he had now a sense of security—Morton's will would be read as soon as his late Uncle's lawyer got home from Europe, which would be in a week; then everything would be lovely. He was glad he had Boots around, though. He sighed, comfortably.

"Let's have coffee here," he said. "It's so comfortable and sort of peaceful."

It was both of those things. The crickets just beyond the open windows were having a swell time knocking their hind legs together; from the pantry came a faint musical chiming of silver being washed, the candles in their high candelabra battled with the last rays of daylight and made the ladies look pretty and old-fashioned and the men clean-cut and brave. In short, it was summer evening at her best.

It continued to be summer evening at her best and sort of peaceful until just after the coffee had been served the front doorbell pealed its mellow chime. Buel went softly to answer its command. A moment later he returned. He looked worried. He had what Towny had come to recognize as the "My God it's another creditor look" on his face. Only it wasn't another creditor. The man bowed to Middleton.

"Mr. Townsend," he said. "A Colonel Barnaby's outside." Here Buel seemed to be struck with a sort of ague. He lowered his voice. "He's brought his baggage, sir!"

Sally Middleton heard and went tense. A quick "Damn him!" escaped her lovely lips. Boots' eyes met Towny's. Her lips twitched as though she wanted to grin. *She* had once seen Colonel Barnaby. Sybil Ashton did grin and whispered to Boots. She whispered, "Of course, my dear, he's

heard about Uncle Morton.” Boots nodded. Only Ashton, the noble soul, lord bless him, who was under the influence of Sally and old port, came through and said the right thing which, of course, at the time, was absolutely the wrong thing.

“Your father, Sally! How perfectly splendid to have him come barging along just at this time!”

It didn’t get across. He didn’t know why, but he knew it didn’t, so he floundered on.

“Share your happiness and all that, I mean.”

It still didn’t get across. Sally, as a matter of fact, hadn’t heard. She was engaged in a more or less scientific problem: Q.: If Colonel Barnaby was sober enough to have got himself here was he sober enough to be presented to the Ashtons? A.: (which she arrived at quickly): Probably not. Q.: What to do about it? A.: Pass the buck to Towny. She did.

“Honey, you go and greet him and if he’s tired from his journey make him lie down for a little spell before we introduce him to a whole lot of strangers.”

Townsend Middleton was furious. Not being much of a psychologist, he’d never dreamed Colonel Barnaby would show up just when he was about to be able to relax for a while. He got out of his chair and spoke the first unkind words he had ever addressed to his bride.

“Boots and Peter and Sybil—a whole lot of strangers!”

That was all he said, but Sally knew what he meant. Angry spots showed in her cheeks. Townsend strode out of the room.

In the fine old hallway of Greenhill, just inside the fine old doorway, stood Colonel Barnaby Barnaby. No one in the old South or the new, for that matter, knew just why he'd been called Barnaby Barnaby instead of being given a regular name, but it was generally assumed that at the time of his christening his father had probably been too plastered to think of one and so, like other men before him, had taken the path of least resistance. It would have been interesting, as he stood there, to pry into the secrets of his mind and see just what he thought of this and that; but, since it is practically impossible to explore an unlighted and tangled wilderness without machetes or other surgical instruments, one has to be contented with more or less surface readings.

As he stood there Colonel Barnaby Barnaby was almost glad he hadn't had that one extra one at the railroad station, which would have made it impossible for him to appreciate his good fortune, and he was exceedingly glad he'd managed to float a loan on the prospects of what Sally'd give him as soon as Morton Middleton's will was shoved through and so had been able to afford the journey from Louisville.

From Colonel Barnaby Barnaby there emanated now a sort of cloud of good will toward all. He looked about him and felt, not unjustifiably, that, after struggling for years against unjust odds, he'd finally succeeded in snookling the truffles.

Colonel Barnaby tore his gaze away from the expensiveness surrounding him when he saw Middleton heading down the hallway. For an instant he was appalled by the ferociousness of Middleton's expression. Then, through his private haze, the idea arrived that, since he was going to be one of the household, if the head of the household was mad about something he should be mad about something too. He put on a ferocious expression. Middleton didn't care for it. He still had thoughts of the horse pistol in the back of his head, so, as he approached, he changed his expression. The Colonel promptly changed his. Middleton advanced and, finally, held out his hand.

"Well, Son!" said Colonel Barnaby. "I'm glad to see you, suh!"

Townsend was so impressed by the sudden change in the man that he forgot himself and said what was in his mind instead of what he'd meant

to say.

“You didn’t lose much time, did you, Colonel Barnaby? Uncle Mort’s only been dead a week.”

Colonel Barnaby waved a hand in a large gesture and looked past Townsend at nothing.

“A week?” he said. “A day? He is of the immortals. I got here as soon as I could float a small—huh—I got here” (he said it *heeyah*) “as soon as possible, suh! Thought I should be with little Sally in her bereavement.”

Townsend didn’t like it. Since Colonel Barnaby *was* his wife’s father, he’d been prepared to ignore, if possible, his sudden haste in arriving at Greenhill the instant Greenhill seemed to be solvent. He *wasn’t* prepared to stand for complete hypocrisy. He had felt so peaceful and at home just a moment ago. Now, hearing this, there occurred to him what had occurred to Topsy Martin on Derby Day. He remembered her saying, “You’ve bought something, Towny.” He stiffened, and probably for the first time in his life was out-and-out rude.

“You came here,” he said, “because you knew I wasn’t busted any more. You came here to sponge—I know all about you, see? Sally’s told me.”

Colonel Barnaby, who wasn’t awfully large anyway, shrank a little. In another man it would have been wincing. He said, “Sally knows very little about me.” He leaned, or teetered, toward Townsend. “In fact, just in fact, in case you haven’t found it out yet, Sally knows very very very little about anything!”

His having said this seemed to bother him. It bothered him particularly because Middleton didn’t seem ready to subscribe to the idea. That is, he didn’t nod, man-to-man fashion, confidentially. Colonel Barnaby amplified. He said, “She’s just a child—a little child blinded by the glamour of a rich man.” Then, either liquor he’d had before he got on the Long Island Railroad or the effects of riding on that railroad seemed suddenly to get him, for he did a complete about-face.

“I’ll be frank, suh!” he said. “I’m a poor, broken old man and I’ve come to live here with my daughter Magnolia and you—” he paused, as though he felt something should be added. “Because—” he paused again —“because it’s the loveliest spot I’ve seen on creation, suh!”

Townsend was fish. That business about Greenhill being the loveliest thing this yap had seen on the face of creation struck home. He nodded, shook hands with the man, and said, “It is lovely here, isn’t it!”

“Yes, *suh!*” said Barnaby

Then Middleton’s mind got working.

"By the way," he said. "I married Sally, not Magnolia—just for your information, of course; and are you too potted to be presentable or can you come in and have coffee with us?"

Colonel Barnaby began to sputter. Middleton cut him short. He said, "Sally told me you might maybe have to lie down for a while if you were tired from your journey. Can you make the grade?"

"Make the grade, suh?" Barnaby did a terrific straightening. He looked, for a second or so, almost like a Kentucky Colonel. Middleton thought once more of the horse pistol. He thought of it even harder when Barnaby's hand seemed almost unconsciously to glide toward his hip pocket, though of course Towny should have thought of the empty flask there and not pistols. To sort of ease things up he forced a laugh.

"If you're a little stinko it's all right," he said and—because he suddenly thought Barnaby looked pathetic standing there surrounded by his battered luggage which none of the servants had been willing to move till they had his, Middleton's, orders to do so—put an arm around his shoulder. After all this was Sally's father—ought to give the old louse some sort of welcome to Greenhill. "Would you go for a touch of Napoleon brandy, Colonel? I mean the real thing?"

An expression almost of reverence lighted Barnaby's face.

"My son!"

Townsend didn't like the way he said it.

"Your son-in-law," he said.

"Oh, no," said Barnaby. "I don't feel like that about *you* at all!"

Townsend for a fleeting second recalled again the words of Topsy Martin at Louisville when she had suggested in no uncertain way that he had bought something. Quite apparently, he had.

Somehow, after the advent of Colonel Barnaby, things were intangibly different at Greenhill. He wasn't really a bad guest or member of the household, with two exceptions: he would persistently fall asleep in hallways where he'd be tripped over, and then when he'd been tripped over he'd get frightened, and there'd be a great to-do calming him down and he'd have to be given brandy which invariably made him drop off to sleep again in some odd place; and he would insist on acting as host to whoever came there, treating Townsend more or less as a little boy he was very fond of who had married the daughter of the house.

It got under Towny's skin. Sally, because she (as naturally she would) fitted into the old boy's act perfectly, also began to get under his skin. He began, in short, to feel his home was not his own, and he didn't care for it. But, on the other hand, he couldn't see anything he could do about it. He took to driving Boots down to Belmont and clocking the early-morning gallops. Then, after he'd come home for breakfast, he and Bill walked over the broad acres of his estate fixing fences that the foxhunters had broken the previous autumn and doing odd little things like that which any one of the many employees of Greenhill could have done much better. Sometimes Boots came along on these tours, sometimes not—she was usually too busy superintending the care of and exercising the remaining horseflesh in the stables.

Toward the middle of this week following the night of Barnaby's arrival, she was riding old Wrack-By, to try to get some of his spring grass-stomach off him, so he'd feel better and wouldn't look so foolish when, as, and if Townsend were able to send him to Frayling at Belmont to have him polished up for the summer steeplechasing.

She had been riding through the woods with that ridiculously serious expression on her face she always wore when she was "working" with race horses. But the expression was habit. She hadn't been thinking about horses—not even about old Wrack-By, who strode strongly beneath her with the assurance an aging steeplechaser should have. She had been thinking how very odd it was that she had suddenly become officially a lady, and she was thinking how she really hated living on Townsend Middleton's bounty and how she especially hated it since, as

yet, there wasn't a nickel of honest cash in the Middleton exchequer—it was all still just the anticipation of Morton Middleton's will.

Valerie Boots O'Connel, though her old man was a horse trainer, had been raised in a tradition of high honorableness. Living—and living with a splurge—on something you didn't have wasn't part of it. Besides, she hadn't found being officially a lady much fun. Sybil Ashton and the Whitneys and the Vanderbilts who raced had always been her friends even though she was naturally never asked to their houses. She *knew* they were friends because of the horse talks they had together at the tracks—which were arguments, half the time, in which things she had to say were listened to and respected. Since she'd been officially declared a lady all she'd had was trouble. The non-horse crowd Sally Middleton invited to the house treated her with a forced politeness that went right through her. The others—the ones she knew—seemed to feel funny about coming to the house, now that Sally was its chatelaine.

Wrack-By stopped to garner some of his beloved and now forbidden grass. She didn't even notice. She was thinking it was awful sweet of Townsend Middleton to be trying to help her but just typical of the muddle-headed way he went through life: ready to give anyone connected with Greenhill the shirt off his back, even if he didn't happen to own the shirt. Suddenly, to that horse's great surprise, she drove her small sharp heels into Wrack-By's ribs.

"Get on!" she said. Then she took her reins up racing short and growled at him the way jockeys do to get a slow starter moving. "It won't hurt you, you cow!"

The steeplechaser grunted, turned his head to look at her once in surprise; then, feeling the short rein and remembering his last racing, started off at what, considering his grass belly, was a considerable pace. There were a couple of fences ahead of them. He soared over them in his stride, then they came to the far woods and Boots checked him.

The woods were on top of a little hill. She rode into them and then pulled Wrack-By to a walk, thinking he'd be cool enough to drink by the time they reached the stream that ran through the bottomland. Presently as she reached a clearing she pulled up to a dead stop. She could hear voices raised in laughter—voices she recognized.

"Chief! If we can swing dis big rock down we can call it Boulder Dam!"

Then Townsend Middleton's half-grunted answer.

"Boulder—doesn't—begin to describe it. Shove, Bill."

And then:

“For all de years I spent makin’ big ones into little ones I *never* saw one *dis* big!”

Valerie Boots O’Connel forgot what she’d been thinking about. She could see from where she halted that for no apparent reason Townsend Middleton and Bill were bent on building a dam, more or less beaver-fashion, across the stream. It looked like fun. She wanted to be in it.

“Come on, Fat Cow!” she said and drove the ’chaser down to the point where the men, stripped to the waist, were struggling with the rock.

“Chief!” she yelled as Wrack-By made gingerly progress. “Chief—I’m a Mahout and I’ve got an elephant to help you!”

Both men looked up. Both men looked, at the moment, sort of foolish, as though they’d been surprised at a wicked orgy. Boots went on.

“Chief, if you don’t think I’ve got an elephant, look at his grass belly.”

Towny and Bill looked. Both of them understood. When a race horse gets fat he looks so much fatter than anything else. Middleton said, “Right, Boots, back him up against Bill and we’ll get Bill backed up against the rock and there we are!”

Townsend Middleton was laughing—really laughing, and it occurred to Boots it was the first time she’d seen him really laugh since the Derby fiasco. Inside she was glad. Bill looked troubled; but then, Bill always looked troubled.

“Okey dokey, Bill!” she said. “Get going.”

But Bill wouldn’t. He took himself off a few paces muttering comments about what sort of people it was that was willing to rub a man against a rock preferable to a horse.

Boots said, “What *are* you doing, Mr.—” she checked—“Chief?”

“Building a dam,” said Middleton. Without knowing why, he was sort of glad Boots had happened on him and Bill half-stripped, perfectly natural, playing. He somehow hadn’t liked the idea of her thinking of him, as she must have, as being constantly stuffed-shirt and social. “It just seemed a good idea,” he added.

Boots surveyed the smooth course of the little stream. It was interrupted now by rocks they had placed here and there, that had made more of a rapids than anything even approaching a dam.

“It looks fine the way it is,” she said.

Townsend looked down.

“I know it,” he said, “but Bill and I just thought we’d like to accomplish something.”

Valerie Boots O’Connel was suddenly stricken with a hate and she

wasn't one to know hate. She hated this man, who had been from her earliest childhood imaginings a sort of Prince Charming, for never in all his life having accomplished anything and for now, when his house was still tottering round his head, being so childishly excited about building a dam.

"Good grief!" said Valerie Boots O'Connel and with that she spun Wrack-By on his heels and, even though he had a long catalpa branch in his mouth and was really quite interested in it, made him back up against the boulder.

The boulder stirred, moved, began to roll. By the time it had crashed into the little river she had yelled, "Get on, Cow!" and had slammed her minute heels into Wrack-By's sides and started off through the woods at a pace really great horses had found it awfully difficult to keep up with on a nicely turfed track. Grass belly and all, she took him straight over the fields and fences to the stables, where she turned him over to a wee stable boy to walk until he was cooled out.

Townsend Middleton watched her go. He was puzzled. Presently he said to Bill, "You know, Boots acted kind of funny, I thought."

Bill nodded.

"All women's funny," he said.

"She acted," said Towny, "as though she were sore at me for building a dam." Then he laughed again. "That's too absurd."

"Nothing's absurd where women's in it," said Bill. He looked at Townsend, who was still staring in the direction Boots had gone. "We gonna go on playin'?"

Townsend shook his head.

"I want to find Boots and see what's biting her."

They started walking slowly back towards the house.

But Townsend Middleton didn't find Boots when he got back to the house. He found Colonel Barnaby "resting" in the front hall; was tempted to kick him as he passed, but restrained himself and went on up to his room to change into dry clothes. He was vaguely troubled about Boots. When he reached his room he stopped being vaguely troubled and became violently so.

On his pincushion was a note — an absurdly childish note because its writer had so obviously tried to be dignified. It said:

DEAR MR. MIDDLETON,

I appreciate more than I can tell you your great kindness in taking me into your home, but it's just no use. I can't stand living on something we have not got and always pretending like we have and not doing anything about it.

So if you will excuse me I am taking Pete the Dalmatian and going off to work and support Black Mamba and Elvira which you so very kindly gave me. I am sure I can.

You will find Wrack-By needs a lot of work to get his belly off. The others are nearly ready to go into training as soon as you get the money from your uncle.

Thanking you again I am,

[Here a phrase culled from her sire]

Your obedient servant,

VALERIE O'CONNEL

P.S. *[And here the pull of Greenhill began to get her]* I think you'd better watch Paddy. He's drinking. Also, Bright Rain looks to me like she might be in foal.

V.O'C.

P.P.S. *[And here a smear on the ink that looked as though it must have been made by a tear.]* I hate leaving Greenhill, Mr. Middleton, and leaving our cottage and the house and everything, but I know I've got to. Please understand, Mr. Middleton. You're so nice even

if you don't do anything that I know you will. Good-by.

BOOTS.

Middleton had half-smiled as he read the letter. When he read the P.P.S. he wanted to weep. Then he grew, for him, oddly thoughtful. Sally Barnaby had shown him how high-idealed it was of him to do nothing grandly, so that Greenhill might go on. Boots O'Connel had just shown him, naïvely, honestly, how she felt about it. For the first time in his life it occurred to him that Boots' viewpoint might be the right one. But he couldn't stand there thinking about himself; little Boots had run away to face the world—to try and smack a living out of it. Dangerous, that—too dangerous for somebody as pretty as she. He stepped to the bell, pushed it savagely, and began to fling off his dirty clothes.

Buel came, morning-coated.

"Tell Bill to get dressed in a hurry, and then have my car brought round."

He figured he could probably get to the Long Island Railroad station in New York as soon as Boots and could meet her there and then persuade her to come home—at least until he could get her a suitable job.

"Dammit," he said aloud as he dressed, "she's practically my ward!" Actually he was thinking, "Little Boots—heartbroken—no father—no friends—no anything—alone in the big city."

Dressed, he started downstairs. On the landing he met Sally. She laid a hand on his arm and stopped him.

"Why, honey! Where you-all going? It's time for luncheon."

"Town," said Middleton. "Dammit, Boots has run away! Got to get her back!"

Sally smiled. Her moment of victory, that she'd so been looking forward to, was turning out to be a washout. She'd driven out the opposition (she thought) and Middleton was hell bent to go and bring it back. But she smiled, because she was pretty sure the opposition wouldn't be having any of it.

"Oh, Towny! But you must, honey—hurry!"

He pecked at her cheek and went on to where Bill was already waiting for him in the car, climbed in, and roared off down the driveway. When they got on a straight road so that he didn't have to hold on quite so hard, Bill nudged him.

"Hey, Towny, what's up? Lawyer got back?"

"Boots beat it." He handed Bill the note. Bill read it and whistled.

"Dat's hell, Towny. Must make you feel fierce."

"It does."

"She as much as says she likes you but you're such a lazy good-for-nothing bum she can't stand to be 'round you." Bill laughed, uproariously. "De noive of Bootsie!"

Middleton shut his lips tight and drove on at terrific speed. Bill stayed silent for a moment or so. Then, fearing from the look on Middleton's face that he might have hurt his idol's feelings by treading on the clay part of the idol's feet, he sought to make amends.

"You ain't, Towny. I know you ain't."

Middleton swung the car with a wild shrieking of tires into the North Country Road and rammed the accelerator to the floor. Bill tore his eyes from the dancing instruments on the dashboard and looked up at the sky, because that at least didn't seem to be going by as fast as the trees and telephone poles and cars they passed. In the sudden comfort of this he found speech again.

"I know you ain't, Towny; what the hell, you took me from de gutter straight when I come from the Big House an' made me what I am to-day."

Their speed dropped from eighty to seventy and Middleton smiled. He couldn't help it. Bill's pride in what he was to-day—No Man for a penniless Rich Man ... But the fact that he was proud of his position was something for him, Middleton, to be proud of. He took a hand from the wheel and patted Bill's knee.

"Don't *do* dat," said Bill, suddenly embarrassed; "we might have accidents."

"We won't," said Middleton. "I *can* drive a car." He laughed into the wind. "Bill, I think if I had to I *could* be a chauffeur—if I ever was broke."

Bill settled this train of thought swiftly.

"*If* you ever was broke! My gawd! *If* you ever was broke!" He paused, lost in heavy thought; then, "But Boots wouldn't think much of your bein' a shofer." His ponderous thinking continued. "Say," he said after a few miles. "What makes you think you're gonna be broke some more—again, I mean?"

"I don't," said Townsend. "I just meant there were a couple of things I could do, Bill, if I had to."

Bill nodded. Then he said, "You could be a jock, but you weigh out too heavy." He chuckled. The idea of the idol being anything except just what he was was too ridiculous even to traffic with in his mind. "You

could be a cheff, Towny, but you can't cook."

He roared with laughter again and presently they hit the Queensborough Bridge traffic and Middleton parked the car and the two of them took the subway to the Penn Station. There they waited while train after train arrived, discharged its suburban ladies, in for an afternoon's theater, movie or what not; and after three quarters of an hour they met by agreement at the newsstand in the main waiting room. Bill noticed that Middleton was white-lipped.

"She's disappeared, Bill."

"Let's go have a Scotch-an'-soda," said Bill, "and discuss the situation."

They did. Townsend did most of the discussing, which, naturally, consisted of thinking things aloud; but Bill contributed comments from time to time calculated to aid his thought—comments such as, "Well, if it was you where would you be?" And "If it was me, I'd be at such and such a place." Eventually he scored a winner. He said, "Well, when I gets out of jail,"—caught and corrected himself, accompanying the correction with a silly smile,—"*I mean when I used to gets out of jail, I always went to de guy or de dame I knew, in what town it happened to happen in, who for my money knew de most about dat town.*"

Middleton, miserable over his third Scotch-and-soda, looked at Bill as though he were an oracle. Then, quite calmly, almost unappreciatively, Bill thought, he said, "Of course."

He got up and buried himself in a telephone booth and dialed a number. A maidservant answered his ring.

"This is Mr. Middleton, Lucy—Miss Topsy there?"

"Topsy's here," came a voice, obviously from an extension phone in the apartment. "What the hell, Towny?"

"Listen!" His voice sounded to Topsy so agonized that she was not only amused but delighted, because she knew what was coming. "Listen, Boots has run away. I've got to find her. I've simply got to, Topsy. Have you heard from her?"

"Put your shirt-studs back in," said Topsy Martin. "She's here."

"Be right up," said Middleton.

"No," said Topsy, "you won't."

"But I'm here in town. I've come to tell her she's got to come home and—and—not be a damned fool."

"Snap out of it, Buttercup," said Topsy. "I'll take care of her."

"Oh," said Middleton.

"I wouldn't let you see her anyway. She's making the Great Gesture

and,” Topsy’s voice softened, “apparently leaving that moss-covered worm-eaten manse you run down on the Island has got her down. It took most of her guts to do it, but I’m backing her.”

Most guardians, either legal or otherwise, of pansy-eyed wards would undoubtedly have felt that to have such an utterly and frankly unmoral person as Topsy Martin harboring and backing their charges was a thing impossible to condone. Towny thought it was swell. He wanted to see Boots and tell her there wasn’t any reason on God’s green earth why she should leave Greenhill; but, since he couldn’t, the idea of Topsy flapping the protecting wing over her was the nuts.

He said, “You’re a good kid, Topsy—I like you.”

Whereat Topsy grew coy.

“I’ve always liked you, Towny—might have married you”—a chuckle distinctly followed this remark—“if you’d had any dough.”

“You swine!” said Townsend. “You utter swine!”

“By the way,” Topsy went on, taking this in the complimentary way in which it was intended. “Speaking of this and that, that lovely bunch of roses and moonlight you married telephoned a while ago. She said to tell you Uncle Morton’s lawyer was back and, if you could be got there, the will would be read to-night. Apparently if you’re not there the reading won’t count.”

A little thrill shot through Middleton. This meant the years of creditor-stalling were over. He told Topsy good-by, called Sally, said he’d be home in time for dinner, and rejoined Bill. He felt satisfied with himself and with the world. As he walked across the café toward the place where Bill was sitting he had sweet visions and plannings. One of them was that, when he came into his own, he would make Boots O’Connel trainer of the Greenhill string—actual trainer, boss of the works. She’d love it. Bill saw his smug grin.

“What’s up?” he said. “Find Boots?” Middleton nodded. “Glad I was a help to you,” said Bill. Middleton continued to grin. Presently, having ordered another drink, he placed his arm about his No Man’s shoulders.

“Bill,” he said, “to-night—after dinner to-night at Greenhill, we’re going to hear that sweet, sweet music of the lawyer’s voice reading aloud, to all of us of Greenhill, the final will and testament of my wretched tightwad uncle!”

“Three rousing cheers!” said Bill. A few moments later they rose and started a leisurely progress to the country. Each of them was so filled with relief it is a wonder they started at all and didn’t, instead, just stay on where they were and celebrate.

The will-reading, as such things should, took place in the library at Greenhill immediately after an unpleasant dinner at which Colonel Barnaby was hosty beyond belief and insisted on toasting, over and over again, "Our good fortune."

After he'd done it three times Bill, who was sitting next to Towny, leaned over and whispered to his chief.

"Want me to do anything about dat, Chief?"

"Later," Middleton whispered. "Later, Bill."

Sally had worn a black evening gown for the occasion. It really wasn't the best of taste on her part, since Townsend wore tennis flannels and a dinner jacket, but when they filed into the library—she, Colonel Barnaby, Ranson of the bank, Bill, the lawyer, and Towny—and she had draped herself in a straight-backed chair, she looked magnificent. Townsend, sitting across from her, thought so. He thought so to such an extent that he was sorry she'd rung her father in on him, and had got so very society-conscious, and hadn't acted at all the way she had in Louisville since they'd been married.

The lawyer, as lawyers do, went to the desk, and after opening a briefcase, ruffled a lot of papers just as though he didn't know all the time just exactly where the one he wanted was; and, eventually, hauled out the will. This will of Morton Middleton's was a very important bit of paper. Actually the lawyer himself didn't know what was in it, because his father had drafted it, sealed it, and had never happened to tell him its contents; and so, although he was as sure as everyone else in the room how it would read, his hands trembled as he opened the envelope. Any document disposing of something over twenty millions of dollars is, *ipso facto*, a pretty exciting document.

He started to read, waded through pages of stilted legal phrasing giving this person and that person one—five—ten thousand dollars; distributing personal effects—gold watches and such to various people who'd been nice to Morton Middleton because they thought maybe Morton Middleton would carve up swell. The residue was the meat—everyone in that room was waiting for the official wording on that residue business, because *that* meant where the millions went. All of

them, as the lawyer began approaching this, wore the expressions of a group of civil executives waiting for the mayor to cut the ribbon opening a brand new highway that everyone knew was open anyway.

“The residue of my estate I leave to the first male issue of my brother John....”

He was interrupted for an instant by Bill saying, “Dat’s you, Towny, you old Male Issue you!”

“Go on,” said Townsend.

But for some reason the lawyer didn’t seem able to go on. He was, at heart, a kindly man. He’d really looked forward to reading this will; and yet, at this instant he looked like a man on the verge of a stroke. His face was bright purple. Middleton jumped up and went to him.

“Well?” he said. “Go on.”

The lawyer swallowed a couple of times; then, looking only at the paper before him, went on:

“Provided said manchild shall at no time have borrowed against the prospects of this specific inheritance.”

The lawyer paused. The silence in that room was so very dramatic he couldn’t help pausing—dramatically. He knew as well as everyone else that Towny’d been borrowing against the prospect of that specific inheritance for the past five years. After a moment, while he recovered his own composure, he said, “Of course you could try to break the will, Townsend, but there—isn’t—a—chance. That spendthrift clause—it holds every time!”

“Dere goes twenty million berries,” said Bill.

“It’s an outrage!” said Sally Barnaby Middleton.

“A *damned* outrage, *suh!*” said Colonel Barnaby. He turned sharply to Townsend. “You-all have swindled me, *suh!* You have married my daughter Magnolia under false pretenses!”

Townsend Middleton heard all these words as though they were being spoken from afar off. It had never, but never occurred to him that this could happen. He passed his hand over his eyes, then, suddenly, the shock passed and he began to laugh. He laughed a little hysterically. Bill came over and stood by him.

“Towny! Dis ain’t nuttin’ to laugh at!”

Townsend met his worried look. Bill saw that his eyes were bright; they looked, to him, bright with merriment, but that seemed goofy, so

he decided they must be bright with fever.

"Towny, for God's sake don't laugh at twenty million berries goin' down de sink!"

Townsend Middleton stopped laughing and smiled. He smiled with the corners of his mouth twitching with real amusement.

"Lord knows I'm not laughing at that," he said. "I'm laughing at all the people who've been sucking around me for years because they thought I was going to be rich. It's a howl, Bill, really it is! Look at Colonel Barnaby there. He looks as though he'd been struck by lightning."

Colonel Barnaby straightened for an instant at this and let his hand stray toward his hip. Then Sally, who was, if one could call it that, the brains of the Barnaby group, went over to the lawyer.

"Mr. Preece," she said. "Does this mean we'll get nothin'? I mean nothin' at *all*?"

The anguish in her voice was not quite ladylike. The lawyer nodded.

"Absolutely nothing," he said. "While you have," he coughed, "been recovering yourselves, I've glanced ahead. The will says that certain of the personal debts of this male issue shall be paid,—out of the residue,—then it goes to," he looked down at his papers, "a long list of charitable enterprises." He coughed and, for just an instant, got human. "It does seem a damned shame, Townsend, all that money just—disappearing, but—" He shrugged. "There it is."

Townsend also shrugged.

"There it is."

"I'm wit you, Chief!"

Colonel Barnaby rose from the settee he'd been favoring. He made one of his remarkable efforts and, as usual, succeeded for a second or two in looking like a Kentucky Colonel. He crossed to Middleton and stood, nearly erect, before him.

"I shall bring suit, suh! I shall indeed. Meanwhile—meanwhile, my daughter Magnolia and I will leave this house to-night!" He too paused dramatically. "Tell your lawyer to provide whatever may be necessary for us."

With that he stalked from the room. Before he closed the door he called, "Come, daughter."

He really created, by all this nonsense, an exceedingly awkward situation. No one there knew quite what to do. Presently Sally rose from her straight-backed chair. She looked like a lovely musical comedy star making her heartbreak exit at the end of the second act.

"Townsend, I've got to stand by my father."

Middleton gestured.

"Go ahead."

"But Townsend, you've got to understand—he's *terribly* upset."

"So am I," said Townsend Middleton. Then, something that had been boiling in him for some little time—boiling and puzzling—rose to the surface. He spoke to his wife as he had never dreamed he could speak to any lady. He said, "And just what the hell is this Magnolia business the old louse keeps getting off? Are you his daughter or aren't you? and is your name Sally or Magnolia or what?"

"And just what might that be to you?"

"Please!" said Mr. Preece, the lawyer. He was getting confused.

"I only wanted to get things straight," said Townsend. "You see," he smiled crookedly at Sally, "I don't think you really like me very much, but we're married, and I still own the place here, and even if your name is Magnolia, why there's no reason why we shouldn't try and make a go of things. I suppose you can cook?"

And then Sally Barnaby stepped, figuratively, right out of that lovely black evening gown, and became herself.

"I haven't cooked since I tied up with the Colonel and became his daughter, and I'm not going to begin now! So there, flash guy!"

With that she left the room. She left a very silent room—a room filled with mingled emotions, most of them pretty outraged. Presently Middleton moved (he was the first to recover consciousness, so to speak) and put his hand on the lawyer's arm.

"Read the rest of it to Bill, will you? I—there's a mare down in the stables that I think needs some looking after."

He passed from the room through the open French windows leading onto the lawn. Bill, with the same guarded look on his face he'd worn at the wedding, folded his arms and settled down to listen to the rest of the will. Middleton, when he left, meant to go to the stables, but he stopped at the edge of the lawn and sat down on the damp grass. He knew if he went on to the stables his heart would break because all the horses there were so very soon going to belong to somebody else. The lawn—the land—would still be his—for a while, anyway. He wanted to try and figure some way of doing what Boots had called, "Something about it."

It was the first active effort along those lines he'd ever made, but, in his heart, he wasn't sorry. It had occurred to him when he'd seen how "Colonel" Barnaby and his daughter had acted that living on the work of dead men wasn't perhaps quite in keeping with all the fine traditions

he'd always thought of himself as being steeped in.

He sighed. He'd be glad when Sally and the Colonel and the lawyer had gone. It meant he could start life all over again.

He had courage enough to want to.

Actually he didn't begin life all over again until a week later. It took that time to straighten out the unholy mess Morton Middleton's last will and testament had left him in. Middleton's debts of honor, such as the fifty thousand he owed Topsy and the horse feed bills, were paid. The remaining horses were sold for what they'd bring to pay the grocers and butchers and tailors that flocked to Greenhill in droves. At the end of the week he was reasonably square with the world, but his credit was completely blooey. He couldn't have borrowed a dime from the Morris Plan with J. P. Morgan and the King of England endorsing his note. In cash he had ten dollars. He had Greenhill, with the interest on the mortgages paid for some time. He had two race horses that were so old no one would buy them. He had a mongrelly stable terrier, and he had Bill.

Townsend had told Bill to get out while the getting was good, but Bill had merely knocked his knees together, gestured toward the broad acres of Greenhill, and said, "I'd like to, Towny, but I can't. Goldarn it, Chief! Dis is my *home*."

This, on Saturday night, after the last of the creditors had disappeared and they were sitting in the Greenhill kitchen. They had dined there—Towny had insisted on calling it that—and had washed the dishes and pots and pans and were now sipping an after-dinner brandy from great-bellied, rich-looking glasses. Presently the lights went out.

Townsend sighed, wearily.

"I sort of expected that," he said.

"Schweinhunds!" said Bill. "De utilities! De rotten schweinhunds!"

"Let's go into the dining room and light the candles."

They did and then sat at the table, still with their glasses dignifiedly before them.

"De gas is off too, Towny. I didn't tell you before."

Townsend chuckled.

"You know, Bill," he said, "after all the guy who built this house in the first place didn't have gas or electric lights, yet he got along all right and was quite proud of it."

Bill didn't answer. The silence of the empty house,—which was so

very different from the warm silence of a full one,—was beginning to get on his nerves.

“Is dere ghosts here, Towny?”

“Sure,” said Middleton. “My great-uncle’s.”

“What’s he do?”

“Comes to the front door and rings the bell.”

“Oooh!”

“The electrician always said it was a short circuit, but I told him it couldn’t be because a house like this rated a ghost and I insisted on having one. He didn’t understand.”

“No,” said Bill.

The candles flickered. The mahogany all around them reflected the flicker in ghostly shadows. Bill twitched. Townsend, watching him, grinned. He could grin because the show was over now and he didn’t have to pretend any more. The very worst had happened; anything that happened now would be better. It made him feel quite young. In fact he found himself hoping the doorbell would ring, even though he couldn’t afford an ancestral ghost anymore. The doorbell did ring. Bill let out an unearthly howl and bolted beneath the table.

“There he is, Bill,” said Townsend.

No reply. Townsend got up to answer the bell.

“Chief! Chief! Where you goin’?”

“I’m going to see if I can touch him for money enough to pay the electric light bill.”

Still grinning, Townsend went to the door and, with a great clanking of bolts, merely for Bill’s benefit since it wasn’t even locked, flung it open and peered into the darkness broken by the glare of a car’s headlamps.

“For the love of mike!” cried Topsy Martin. “How about some light? Or are you hiding?”

“No can do,” said Townsend.

“Oh,” said Topsy. “I get it.” She turned toward two other people who were getting out of the car. “Here’s Boots—she’s sort of embarrassed at calling on you—and Popsy. We’ve got ideas.”

“Hello—Chief.” A warm little hand found his in the darkness and shook it firmly.

“Boots!”

“How are you, Chief?”

“Swell, Boots.”

Humber came and shook hands with him then. He whispered, “Be

glad to help you, if I can, Middleton.”

“Not a chance,” said Townsend aloud, “but thanks—I mean it. You’re a good guy, Josh. But you see I couldn’t pay you back now.”

“Flags flying high, eh? Good. As Tops says, we have ideas.”

He led them through the gloom of the hallway to the dining room, yelling at Bill as they came to bring some things for his great-uncle’s ghost to drink. When they got into the glow of candlelight he looked at Boots and was thoroughly and completely astonished. In fact he blinked. Topsy Martin was considered, by those who knew, to be one of the niftiest-looking ladies about town, both from the point of view of Topsy herself and from the point of view of the way she was turned out. Yet, standing there beside her, it seemed to Towny that Boots from both points of view looked even niftier. It seemed absolutely impossible to him that this exceedingly smart young lady could ever, even in another age, have appeared before sixty-odd thousand people in battered boots and breeches and a turtleneck sweater.

It seemed just as odd to Boots that Townsend Middleton could be living all alone at Greenhill with Bill without even being able to afford electric light. Needless to say, neither of these two expressed these opinions, but suddenly each of them was conscious of a sense of strangeness toward the other. It wasn’t reasonable and it didn’t make sense, but there it was. Topsy, settling Humber into a chair at the table and pretending he was a very old man who had to be assisted at such an operation, got it.

“I’ve done a good job, don’t you think, Towny?”

“She’s been swell, Chief,” said Boots. For an instant the sense of strangeness vanished. “*Look at me!*”

“He’s been looking,” said Topsy. “Plenty.”

Boots blushed and was glad no one could see that she was blushing. She was almost grateful to the Electric Light Company for having shut down on the current. There was an embarrassing pause, then Townsend said, “You mustn’t call me Chief now, Boots—there isn’t much point to it. I’ve nothing left to be chief of.”

“Yes you have,” said Boots quickly. She supposed it was because she was Irish and sentimental, but she’d found sudden tears in her eyes. “You’re—you’re the master of Greenhill. That’s being chief—of something.”

“Oh, my God!” said Topsy. “Honest, Towny, I’ve tried like hell to get this steeped-in-Greenhill stuff out of her head. It’s all that’s wrong with her now. I give up. Popsy, you hear? I give up!”

"Never give up," said Humber, and added impressively, "while I'm alive!"

"You're just a dear old squirrel," said Topsy. "That's what you are."

"I am not a squirrel!" said Humber. It was a silly remark because he loved having Topsy call him a squirrel when they were alone. In fact he had even, from time to time, asked her if he was not a squirrel, just for the joy of hearing her say he was. Immediately she took issue.

"But you *are*, Popsy; only the other day you ..."

She was providentially interrupted by Bill coming clattering through the swinging door to the pantry, carrying, after a fashion, a huge silver platter loaded with bottles and glasses of all shapes and sizes.

"The gang's all here," muttered Bill through clenched teeth as he swung the tray to the table. "Hi, Bootsie! Hi, Topsy! Hi,—!" he just caught himself in time—"Mr. Humber."

Bill was received enthusiastically, particularly so by Humber, who regarded him that instant as an absolute angel of mercy. He wouldn't have minded if Bill *had* slipped and called him Popsy. The tears fell out of Boots' eyes and were not replaced when she realized that Townsend Middleton still had somebody to wait on him and take care of him, even if it was only Bill.

Townsend Middleton, recovering from the embarrassment of the recent conversation, went to the tray and mixed highballs. Scotch-and-sodas for Topsy and Humber, Brandy-and-sodas for himself and Bill. Then, stricken, he remembered he'd forgotten Boots. Lousy, to do that—she was a damn pretty girl come to call on him and he was treating her like a kid who naturally wouldn't be asked if she wanted a drink. He unconsciously snapped his fingers, which gave him away, but he carried the thing off well enough. He said, "Boots, I knew what these people wanted and so just whipped it up. You, not being a confirmed drunk like the rest of them, might like something else. So I've waited—forgive, Lady?"

Boots forgave.

"I'd like some whiskey and water—without ice."

He mixed it, feeling very strange, fixing a drink for Pop O'Connel's kid daughter. He felt even stranger when he reached across the table and handed it to her, because she didn't look the least bit like Pop O'Connel's kid daughter. She looked like a Broadway star—the sort of clean bright star guys hitch their chariots to, and so travel either way, way up or way, way down, depending on themselves. Their eyes held for several seconds as he gave her the glass, and he noticed for the first

time in his life that Pop O'Connel's daughter had eyes like velvety pansies. He wondered a little that he hadn't noticed it before.

"And now—" said Topsy. "If you're through getting a load of Boots, Towny—to business."

"Hungh?"

"I said we had ideas. That was why we came here. Boots came to see you."

"Get on with 'em," said Townsend. "I haven't any ideas at all."

"Well," said Topsy, making herself comfortable on the arm of Popsy's chair, "you've obviously got to go to work." Towny nodded. "Sorry as we all are, of course."

"I'm not sorry," said Townsend.

"The point is," Boots put in, "what event to schedule you for." She laughed. "You see you run as a maiden, Chief."

"*Please!*" said Bill. He didn't realize Boots merely meant in horse language that he was an untried performer—so far, a non-winner.

"I could start you in business, of course," said Humber, "but with all due respect, Townsend, I think you'd be an awful nuisance in a business."

"De Chief is no nuisance," snapped Bill loyally. "He may be like Bootsie said, a good for nothin' bum, but he's no nuisance, get it?"

Before Humber could answer, Boots cried, "I never said that!"

"You thought it," said Bill. She kept silent and hung her head like a race horse that's been caught stalling. Middleton reached out and patted her arm.

"Bill talks to himself a lot, you know, Boots. He's not quite all there upstairs. Forget it, kid."

"I did think it—once," said Boots. "I'm goddam sorry now I ever did."

"Here, here," said Humber. "This is supposed to be a conference." He smiled at Townsend. "You see, Topsy and I have appointed ourselves a sort of receivership committee to try and conduct the affairs of a busted company so it might get to be solvent again." His smile broadened into a grin. "We've already decided what you're to be, and arranged for you to have a chance at being it. You tell him, Topsy, I don't know the exact word for it."

Topsy hesitated. She had complete faith in Middleton's ability to do the job they'd picked out, but she had grave doubts of being able to sell him on it. She knew from her vast experience with them that gentlemen were, at heart, shy creatures who, with few exceptions, ran from the public eye. Topsy figured to place Middleton right smack in the iris of

the public eye and to keep him there. The silence began to get awkward. She suddenly took a big swig of her highball.

"You know more about race horses and polo, probably, than any young man in this country."

"I couldn't turn pro," said Townsend.

"Nobody wants you to," put in Boots.

"Listen," said Humber, realizing that without his guidance the conference would turn into a cat fight again. "You've no objections to sports writers, have you? I mean if you could be one at a fancy price you would, wouldn't you?"

Middleton laughed.

"Me, *write*? I used to be able to sign my name—can't even do that any more."

"No, but you don't object to 'em—as people, I mean?"

"Lord no! I have them here as guests all the time." Suddenly he looked sheepish. "I mean I used to."

"Adams of de *Tribune* an' Kelley of de *Times*? Pals!" said Bill. "Pals! Of course we don't object to 'em!"

"Well," said Topsy, "how about the men who do sports over the radio?"

"Never heard any. Always been there myself," said Townsend.

And right here Topsy sold out some of her best friends.

"You should," she said. "They smell. They don't know one part of a horse from another..." She caught Humber's eye and stopped. "They don't know a mallet from a ball, one part of a horse from another, they ..."

Boots broke in.

"We've got it fixed for you to have a try-out as a sports commentator, Chief. Gee, it's a swell chance for you—with what you know and who you are—it's a cinch!"

Townsend Middleton's ideas on all people concerned with the air waves were vague and unflattering. Boots' reference to who he was alarmed him too.

"Oh, I couldn't," he said. "I mean—just cashing in on my name!"

"It isn't because of your name!" said Boots, "It's because of what you know, and incidentally trying to keep that swell name bright and shiny's fixed you and me fine, hasn't it? What'd your people ever give you except that name? They gave you a cat an' told you to hang onto it by the tail! You've done all you can about keeping that name bright."

Towny looked at her hard, amazed at her outburst.

"By the way," he said, "how've *you* made out since the crash?"

"I'm doing fine!" said Boots. "I'm being featured in Carrol's new musical." Her eyes lighted and she grew naïve again. "I find an awful lot of people know who I am—just like they do you, Mr. Middleton."

"For God's sake call me Townsend!"

He was thinking hard. A month ago he would have been outraged at Boots capitalizing on the Greenhill name—just as he would have been outraged at the very suggestion of *his* doing it. But he had noticed that Boots seemed to have a certain knack for seeing values in their proper light. After all, why shouldn't both of them capitalize on the name? They were all that was left of Greenhill, really, and they'd both tried in their own way to keep its banners high. Greenhill owed them something. Suddenly he held out his hand to her.

"Go to it!" he said. They shook. Then he turned to Topsy. "I'll broadcast for you dressed in a jockey suit if you think it'll do any good!"

"At'y'ol'fight!" said Topsy. "Audition twelve o'clock to-morrow. We take you in with us to-night if you haven't got carfare."

"What about me?" said Bill. "I'm wit him, you know."

"You," said Humber, "if he pulls it off, cease being a No Man and become a Yes Man—if he pulls it off he'll need one."

"Yes," said Bill, practicing.

Townsend looked about him—the quiet room, the eager faces of these oddly assorted good friends—the only ones of the scores he knew who had wanted to stand by him when trouble came. They all of them acted as though they'd just got a swell present, simply because he'd said he wouldn't be a damn fool any more and would go to work. In an odd way, he felt a little richer than he ever had before.

Townsend Middleton's audition, listened to by the "Program Board" of the great broadcasting company, would, it is safe to say, never be forgotten by the program board of the great broadcasting company so long as any of them lived. It had been arranged in detail by Topsy Martin, who had never had any experience in radio work; and it had been insisted on (which was much more important) by Joshua Humber. He had even gone so far as to say his railroad might be exceedingly interested in sponsoring and paying handsomely for sporting broadcasts by Townsend Middleton, if the competitive bidding didn't jack the price of them too high. The way he put it to the broadcasting company's private lord almighty was, "After all, Jake, if the broadcast this man does is just good enough to interest, without being too good, people won't want to listen to him again and they'll use the railroad to go to see the races and things in person."

Jake knew too much for his own good. Also he was too honest; he said: "Look here, Josh, I know what you're trying to do, but if the boy's that bad we can't possibly send what he's got to say to"—here he raised his arm in a terrifically expansive gesture—"millions and millions of people all over the world."

Humber smiled very gently.

"You can," he said, "if you're paid for it."

Jake grinned and got human.

"We do," he said. "God, how often we do! But, Josh, I know he's a friend of yours and—and—" He'd been going to say Topsy Martin, but didn't *quite* dare—"but why are you backing him? You're supposed to be a pretty tough hombre."

"I'm not backing him," said Humber. "I'm just underwriting him. I think in Middleton you've got the greatest sports drawing card that's ever been offered to radio. He's been publicized all over the world—his horse actually won the Kentucky Derby this spring—good God, man, you can't beat it!"

"If he can talk," said Jake; and then, a shrewdness lighting his eyes, "Even if he *can't* talk—who'd know?"

"*He* would," said Popsy, "and he wouldn't eat it."

“That’s the trouble with trying to do business with gentlemen!” said Jake. Then, half to himself, he added, “but he should be swell. Look, I won’t get anybody to listen—any sponsors, I mean, except you, but we’ll listen and if we figure we can do anything, I’ll let it be noised around among the advertisers that we’ve got something.” He sighed. “Funny, isn’t it, me figuring on how to help you get Townsend Middleton a job!” He laughed and leaned across his large desk. “You know what’s still funnier? Neither of us even *think* of giving him a piker job.”

Humber lifted one of Topsy’s idioms.

“As a piker,” he said, “Towny Middleton would smell.”

■

At precisely eleven, as per arrangement with Topsy, Middleton, dressed in a business suit, presented himself in the downstairs lobby of the great building that housed the broadcasting studios. With him was Bill. It being Townsend’s first venture into the world of business, he thought he should dress as the sad, keen-faced brokers he bumped into at the Union Club when they came back from their offices in the late afternoon dressed. The two of them hunted Topsy. Finally, at the broadcasting company’s information booth, they found her. It was eleven-thirty before they found her. This because (one) she was late; (two) they hadn’t the faintest idea where to look for her because she hadn’t said.

“Well, if it isn’t the Commentator!” was Topsy’s greeting. Bill as usual said, “Hi, Toots,” and Townsend said, “We’re all late, I guess. Will it—will it—spoil things?”

“You couldn’t spoil this!” said Topsy. “Even if you tried. Hell, I’ve even got sound effects—you know, horses’ hooves thundering? Jockeys groaning in agony after their spills? Bettors groaning in agony; cheers, howls, *and* bugles! I’m pretty damn proud of having bugles too. Thank your sister Topsy for seeing to things!”

With that, in sheer exuberance of spirits, she kissed him. Bill stood by solemnly shaking his head. All this made him a little nervous. Suddenly Topsy grabbed him by the arm. This made him still more nervous.

“By the way, Bill,” she said, “what happened to Roses and Moonlight and her dear old dad? I couldn’t ask the other night—everything too confused. I couldn’t ask Towny now ...” (This in spite of the fact that he was right with them.) “So you tell me.”

“Dey turned out to be a coupla crooks!” said Bill. “Can you ’magine dat? He wasn’t even her daddy!”

Topsy now laid a hand on Middleton’s arm. The laugh died out of her

face, the way sunshine dies under a really serious-minded thundercloud.

“Oh, Towny! God, I’m sorry!”

Towny said, “Oh, forget it. ’S part of another era.”

“*Crooks!*” said Bill again. “Can you imagine *dat*?”

Topsy, who knew all about Bill, said: “Can *you*, Number Seven Six Five Seven Four Two?” Whereupon Bill, feeling at home again at recognizing his Sing Sing label, promptly gave her behind a rousing slap—to the delight and wonderment of the several dignified page boys surrounding them—and grinned.

“Let’s go,” said Topsy. She turned to a page boy. “Take us to Studio E.”

Studio E turned out to be a not overly large room with beaverboardish-looking walls, a piano, several strange-looking boxes that looked as though they had been tossed in through the door and forgotten, a glass window giving into a control room, and three microphones. Middleton looked at the microphones and shuddered. He had spoken through them before, but at those times he’d been hauled up to them in moments of excitement to say a few excited words about horses that had just won races. Conscious of his own importance, he’d been unconscious of the microphones. All three of these seemed to leer at him. They seemed like dark, impassive Ethiopian sentries and they sent chills down his spine. Also there was nobody in the room.

Presently a voice coming out of the walls said, “Mr. Middleton, will you step over to the center mike and say a few words, please—just for volume?”

This was familiar! He stepped up to the center microphone and without hesitation said just what he’d said the last time this had been asked of him. He said, “I’m so damn glad Mamby’s won the Futurity I can hardly ...” He stopped short. For a second he’d gone back into a world that didn’t exist any more. When he stopped the engineer’s voice came again through the walls. Topsy thought it sounded funny, Bill and Townsend didn’t notice it.

“Just count, if you like, Mr. Middleton, from one to twenty.”

The engineer had had his shirt on Black Mamba in the Derby. Middleton’s being there, this way, gave him more creeps than the microphones and his voice coming out of the wall gave Middleton.

Slowly Townsend counted, one to twenty, one to twenty, one to twenty. His voice gradually settled down to a level the engineer on the other side of the glass panel of the control room could cope with. Two men came into the room, one pleasant-faced, brisk, executive; the other

somber as though his calling had got him down. This one began inspecting the boxes. The other came up to Middleton, hand outstretched.

"Glad to meet you, sir! Hope we can pull this off. My name's Larsen. Want to do a rehearsal? Hi, Topsy! Let's go."

Middleton grabbed at his sleeve as he went to one of the other microphones and began muttering absolutely unintelligible things into it which were answered in kind by the voice that came through the walls.

"Hey," he said. "Nobody's told me what I do yet?"

"Oh," said Larsen, and laughed. He had a comfortable laugh. "Topsy's the horse race. She and the sound effects tell you what's happening, and you describe it." He laughed again, quite heartily. "It's *her* idea, not mine!" He turned to the sad-looking man who was still staring at the boxes on the floor. "Hi, Sound, try 'em out."

The somber man opened a box and from it produced a variety of rattly gadgets. He then took a piece of paper from his pocket and looked wearily at it.

"It says bugles," he said sadly. "I can't do bugles—I didn't bring anything to make bugle noises with."

"Sound," said Larsen, "did you ever think of using a *bugle* to make bugle noises with?"

"Why no," said Sound, "I don't think I ever did." And then, pretending to laugh in self-justification: "You see it probably wouldn't sound like a bugle over the air." Suddenly he brightened. "Say," he said, "I can make *trumpet* noises—how about trumpet?"

Topsy nudged Larsen.

"We'll settle for trumpet noises."

Sound raised the lids of two other boxes. They were enormous phonographs, each with places for two records to play side by side.

"What's that?" asked Towny.

"Sound tracks—real sound tracks," said Sound proudly. "Horses running an' crowds yelling. We made 'em at the Kentucky Doyby this spring when that guy Middleton's horse got disqualified." He chuckled. "I always said Middleton was betting on the horse they gave the race to."

Townsend instinctively reached out and grabbed Bill by the shoulder just as he was starting his lunge. Larsen turned suddenly quite pale. He didn't like the idea of having police and people like that coming into an audition he was running, to investigate a murder. Still holding Bill, Townsend said, "You didn't know when you said that, that I'm

Middleton. If you knew anything at all about horse racing you wouldn't have said it anyway, would you?"

Sound suffered sudden paralysis. He gaped. Middleton walked across the room and looked him square in the eyes.

"You wouldn't, would you?"

Sound recovered—partially.

"Oh, no sir! No, *sir*!"

Middleton turned to Larsen.

"Let's get on with this."

Sound, very nervous now, arranged his various noise-making contraptions around the room. Topsy, standing beside Townsend, fluttered a sheaf of typewritten pages on which she had written an account of a horse race that she was going to read to Towny so that he could repeat it in his own words.

"Ready, Sound?" From Larsen, who also had a copy of this script, "ready, Mr. Middleton? Topsy?"

"Sure," said Townsend.

"Okay," from Sound. "I guess so."

"Turn 'em over!"

"Turn 'em over," Topsy said because she'd played in pictures, and she thought it would impress people that she knew the technical jargon.

But instead of the absolute silence that usually comes at this stage of an audition, there came, through the walls again, of course, the engineer's voice.

"Sorry, Mr. Larsen, we're too late for a rehearsal. Your audition goes on in one minute and twenty-five seconds. Mr. Middleton, move a little nearer the mike, please. Miss Martin, those papers in your hand sound like thunder and lightning crackling; move them softly, please. Sorry, Larsen. Take the time—one minute left."

Then a terrific tenseness did invade the little room. Towny still hadn't the faintest idea what he was supposed to do. Sound had had no opportunity of synchronizing his gadgets with what Middleton might be going to say, and was so frightened by his unfortunate crack of a few moments before that he was quite unreliable. Topsy was nervous as a witch for Townsend's sake.

Mr. Larsen began to count.

"Fifty seconds, forty seconds, thirty—twenty-five—fifteen—ten—five—four—three—"

"Hey, start with a bugle!" yelled Topsy.

"Trumpet," said Sound.

“Audition of Townsend Middleton, sports commentator.” Larsen spoke into the microphone.

From among his traps Sound now produced, instead of the traditional “Boots and Saddles!” bugle call, what he considered a magnificent fanfare of trumpets. It actually was one hell of a fanfare, the sort of fanfare one might expect Gabriel to blow at sight of Mary Pickford or Jean Harlow. It gave Middleton chills and, by its sheer suddenness, frightened him.

“They’re going to the post,” Topsy read to him in an undertone. “First is Flying Fairy, black horse, looks fit, owned by Petey Bostwick, next is a bay owned by Jock Whitney, next a roan owned by Colonel Jeffords, next is Black Mamba, owned by Townsend Middleton, next is Zephyr owned by ...”

She was drowned out by Sound who, doing his utmost to appease Townsend Middleton for his unfortunate lapse, produced from one of his boxes a terrific sound of cheering and then looked up grinning, from his work. The cheering died down.

“But Tops, darling, what do I say? Nobody’s told me what to say.”

“Say just what I’ve said, jackass!”

All of this, naturally, smack into the microphone.

“What’s the use of my saying it? You’ve just said it.”

“I know, but say it in your own words!”

Topsy was a good trouper. Gradually she was getting pretty frantic. Her franticness was added to by the fact that she knew Townsend wasn’t suffering from stage fright, but, like Sound, simply hadn’t caught on. She kicked herself mentally for not having properly seen to it that they were all there in ample time to rehearse not once but many times.

Townsend, with a sheepish look, repeated most of what Topsy had just said. He repeated it in a hollow listless voice, pretty much mumbling into the mike. Far away, sitting in the vast pine-paneled “Board Room,” Josh Humber listened and shuddered. So did Jake. The rest of the program board were suffering from a case of bad twitchings of the lip that they didn’t like suffering from in the presence of their chief and a Customer. Back in Studio E, Mr. Larsen had turned his face to the wall. He got the picture and he was horribly sorry for Middleton, but, being used to smoothness and expertness in his auditions, he couldn’t look at Middleton’s puzzled face without laughing, so he turned away.

“They’re at the post!” said Topsy.

“They’re at the post,” said Middleton. Then, realizing what was

expected of him, "They all look very fit, their coats are glossy and shiny." He ran out of words, "Very glossy and shiny." Since Topsy gave him no cue and nothing seemed to happen he added, "They look very fit. Very, very fit indeed."

At this point both Topsy and Mr. Larsen turned to Sound. Topsy's voice carried over Larsen's as she yelled, "Hey, you! They're at the post! They're ready to start!"

Sound nodded. No one in the studios had ever suspected he had a voice before, but in his overanxiety to make up to Mr. Middleton and the giant who was obviously his bodyguard, he, in fox hound parlance, gave tongue.

"On your marks—get set—BANG!"

As he said bang he shot off a cannon; it was a small cannon, but it made a lot of noise. He followed this up, one eye on Middleton, with a special sound effect of horses running on (from the sound) Government-test asphalt.

"Oh, for God's sake," said Middleton. "What is this?"

He was thoroughly and completely bewildered. This wasn't a horse race he was supposed to be broadcasting or commentating or whatever they called it—it was a circus.

"It's your chance!" Topsy hissed at him across the mike. "Commentate, damn you, Towny, commentate!"

"I can't," said Townsend. "That feller's making too much noise."

"Hell then, *I'll* commentate!" Topsy glanced at him with complete scorn. "Since you're such a stage-frightened stooge!"

Townsend looked at her aghast. Topsy was his friend. She'd arranged this. He didn't mean to let her down. But the whole thing was so silly. Starting a horse with a gun—and "on your marks—get set—go!" It was beyond him. He stood for a full minute doing nothing but opening and closing his mouth; opening it to apologize to Topsy; closing it suddenly to keep from saying the annoyed things he wanted to say.

Sound, who in his own way was keen, noticed all this. He shot the works. The air—that is the air that went into the pine-paneled room of the program board—was rent. It was rent with the sounds of fallen jockeys groaning in agony and the agony of bettors who were losing; it was rent with all the sound effects Topsy Martin had asked for and a few extra, and over this came the voice of Topsy herself reading the script that she and Boots had prepared the night before—the one horse-race script they thought Towny Middleton might be able to get away with.

As sound effect after sound effect, each one louder than the one

before it, roared out through the splendidly accurate loudspeaker in the pine-paneled room, the Program Board one by one gave themselves up to sheer, tummy-aching, howling laughter. Each sound effect was punctuated by Middleton's violent protests. Topsy Martin's reading of the script was constantly interspersed by cries from him of, "Tops—it wasn't that way—you're all wet! Good grief, whoever heard of such a horse race!" and the amazing, Topsy-selected sound effects went on and on. Sometimes the horses seemed to run on asphalt, sometimes in mud, sometimes they sounded as though they were swimming in surf and sometimes they sounded as though they were hungry. As has been said, Sound shot the works. But Topsy was indomitable.

"They're rounding the three-quarters mark—Black Mamba's moving up—she's fighting for her head—the jockey doesn't seem to want her to run—he's *holding her back!*"

"Oh, God, Topsy, Wee Willie was doing everything he could to get through!"

Topsy ignored him, but Towny wasn't going to have any libel like that go over the air (he thought it was going over the air). Sound had gone back to his records now of crowds cheering—the actual crowds actually cheering the race these two fools seemed to be fighting about. He thought it showed great tact on his part.

"Mamba, come *on!*"

Suddenly Middleton got mad. He got fighting mad the way he sometimes used to get playing polo. Topsy with her stagy ideas and Boots too, no doubt, with hers now, were putting that whole thing—that very messy business of Willie Saunders and his bat—in a wrong light. People were listening. All right, he'd tell 'em! Topsy said "is" instead of "was"—that the horse was coming through, instead of that she came through.... He could do that too. With a sweep of his arm he shoved Topsy from the microphone. The picture of that race was so clearly before his eyes he'd never forget it as long as he lived. He could tell *that* as it had happened.

He began to tell it, and when he began Sound knew instinctively what had happened. He dampened his cheering so that it made an obbligato. He quieted his hoofbeats.

"Black Mamba's at the half—she's running strong in third place—she's got the heart of a lioness—she'll come through when Willie asks her to. He's just holding her steady now, he hasn't *spoken* to her—when he speaks to her and yells 'Now Mamby!' she'll cut loose. The three quarters—Far Away's still three lengths ahead—Tony second, Mamba

moves to go through the crowd—Wee Willie's told her—she moves up—she's coming fast ...”

Sound *and* the engineer had almost forgotten their official duties; there was a deepness, a sincerity about this voice now that commanded attention. One of the men on the Program Board who snickered because he thought he should snicker was severely stared at by the rest of the board and by Jake, who said: “Shut up, Guy, you're listening to something!”

Townsend Middleton told that Kentucky Derby as it was run. He told all of it—as the story had never been printed. He told it that way to justify Mamby and Wee Willie as both Topsy and Boots had been perfectly sure he would if he was made mad enough. He got so excited and interested in telling it that he was still talking long after he'd finished about the race and the engineer had cut the channel and Humber and Jake were on their way to Studio E. He didn't, in fact, know that the microphone had been disconnected until he felt Humber patting him on the arm and heard him say, “We win, Towny, and I don't think I'm going to have to underwrite you.”

This was as much Greek to Middleton as had been the horrible noises of Sound during the early part of the audition. Also he was still steamed up about that race that was nothing but history now. He motioned Humber aside.

“Get out,” he said, “I'm tellin' 'em! I'm tellin' 'em what's happening!”

“By the way,”—Jake's voice was very deep at times—so deep it could be startling. “By the way, Mr. Middleton, could you go to Chicago next week for the Careena Beauty Cream Company and tell 'em what's happening when the American Derby's run at Arlington Park?”

Townsend Middleton started, seemed to come down out of the clouds.

“Could I *what*?”

“Just what I said—for, say, a thousand dollars and expenses?”

Middleton came nearer to fainting than he had since the last time a polo pony that had rolled over him kicked him in the temple as it got up. He said he could.

Townsend Middleton locked the front door of Greenhill, took the mongrelly stable terrier with him, and went to Chicago. Bill went along and Boots cut a rehearsal to come to the station and see him off. He was exceedingly nervous and unhappy and felt like a boy sent off to boarding school for the first time. But he was deeply touched at Boots being there. He tried to tell her so as they shook hands outside the doorway of his Pullman, but it was difficult because you somehow couldn't just say, "I'm really awfully touched at your coming to see me off," to a person who looked like the sort of person Boots looked like now. As a matter of fact every time he'd seen her since she'd left Greenhill, she'd sort of embarrassed him by her sudden and unsuspected feminineness.

It was so awkward, meeting such a very snappy young lady for the first time, and then having her turn out to be someone you'd seen bathed as a baby, and having her not seem to notice that any epoch-making change had taken place in herself. He said, "Aw, Boots—hell of a note all this, isn't it—thanks a million for coming to say good-by!"

And the baby he had seen bathed answered, "You had to have someone from Greenhill to see you off first time you ran. I've never thought too much of you, Townsend, but so help me you're gonna run hell for leather an' pull it off! So help me Saint Patrick you are!"

Townsend didn't know it, but this was the sort of thing she used to say to the Greenhill race horses in the days when she was helping her father saddle them at the tracks—and the Greenhill horses had always run true. He reached out and took her hand, feeling more and more like a small boy being sent off to school. The hand, to his surprise, didn't go with the rest of her appearance at all. It should have been velvety and soft. It was calloused and even as they shook he noticed the knuckles, enlarged and hardened from holding reins. It made him feel much funnier than if it had been the soft and velvety apparatus young ladies usually held out.

"I will, Bootsie," he said. "You're damn right I'll pull it off."

He didn't even realize he'd called her Bootsie. He never had before. But she realized it and she knew what it meant. The train started. He

climbed aboard. She stood waving until he'd gone out of sight. Then for the first time since her father had died she broke down and cried. It was utterly silly but Townsend Middleton was all the people she had left in the world, and he was going away, and she loved Topsy dearly and it was fun being in the show, but her people were going away.

That afternoon Carrol, after bawling her out for missing an hour of rehearsal, was amazed. He was amazed first because Boots O'Connel, apparently not even having heard the unkind things he'd told her, said, as soon as he'd stopped talking:

"He called me Bootsie!"

And then she had sung the Irish (Gershwin Irish) songs he'd given her the way he'd scarcely dreamed they could be sung. As has been said, the grief and the lament of all the Irish forever was in Boots O'Connel. This day she let fly with it. Carrol decided to feature her name in the show's billing and to get George Gershwin to whip up a nice lament about a dying race horse for her to sing in his next show.

On the train Townsend Middleton, sharing a drawing room with Larsen and Bill—who, delighted at having at least spending money again, was getting himself slowly, but loyally, corned—worried. He worried all that night and all the next day and he worried like anything when they went to the track at Arlington Park at two o'clock and he and Larsen and an engineer from the broadcasting company climbed up to the roof of the stands and he found there the huge binoculars that magnify everything forty-two times set up in front of where he was supposed to talk from.

He laughed when he first saw them, they looked so utterly incongruous compared to his own field glasses. Then he looked through them. He could see practically every grain of dust in the track—even at the far turns. He grinned at Larsen.

"Say," he said, "this is one hell of a swell place to watch a race from."

"Sure," said Larsen, who had done this many, many times. "How about stepping up to that mike there and saying woof-woof-woof?"

"You gone nuts?" said Middleton.

"No," said Larsen. "Saying woof-woof-woof's easier than counting numbers, so we can get tuned to your voice level." He chuckled. "You see you're a pro now." He began adjusting the microphone, moving it here and there to where he thought Middleton would feel most natural behind it. "Say, Middleton, does it make you feel funny doing this? I mean instead of being down there?"

He pointed toward the clubhouse lawn in front of the stands that was

filling now with people. Middleton wished he hadn't reminded him of that, but he grinned again.

"Sure," he said, "wouldn't it you?"

Larsen nodded. Middleton went on.

"But I still think this is a swell way to watch a horse race."

"Just go on feeling like that," said Larsen, "and you'll be rich!"

Then he could have bitten his tongue off, because, obviously, it was so bald a remark. Middleton took it in the spirit in which it was meant.

"That's all right with me," he said, and then, because he still was very nervous and wanted someone—a friend—to lean on—

"You know, to tell you the truth, Larsen, I'd love to be rich—just once. I never have been, you know. If I was—I mean if I could make enough money to afford it, I'd like to start a little racing stable."

"Well," said Larsen. "They never learn."

"Towny's always been a sucker," said Bill who, as usual, was standing right beside his Chief. Larsen turned to him.

"Is it all right," he said, "if I ask you just what the hell you're doing up here with us?"

"Okey dokey wit me," said Bill. "Go ahead an' ask. I'm de Commentator's Yes Man, that's what I'm doin' here. I'm here to see he gets a square deal, see?"

No one, least of all Bill, knew just what he meant by this. They skipped it. Presently the horses filed out for the first race. Townsend nudged Larsen and pointed to the binoculars.

"All right if I watch through these?"

His naïveté delighted the radio man. He'd done this so often he couldn't understand anybody wanting to watch a horse race he didn't have to. Watching horse races was sheer, utter drudgery to him.

"Go ahead," he said. Then he had a minor brainstorm. "I'll be busy testing the channel, so I can't watch. You tell me about it, eh?"

Townsend moved close to the glasses and was again fascinated by how incredibly near they brought the horses.

"By Golly!" he said. "This is the cats, Larsen. Say, there's Wee Willie Saunders up on Gringo. Bill, look at your card and see what weight he's carrying. Hundred and twelve? He's a bet, Bill, at that weight. If you've got any dough beat it down and put it on him for me, will you?"

"Okey dokey, Chief. I got a half-century."

Bill left. Larsen stared at Townsend, who was now completely absorbed in staring at the horses. The baronial way in which he'd ordered Bill to bet his money for him impressed him. He listened while

Middleton told him what was happening at the post and was again astonished because Middleton seemed to know the horses from their general shapes and colors and didn't look at his program at all. Presently the race started.

"They're off!" Towny shouted. "Oooh! What a lousy start—they're bumping all over the place. Look at young Wee Willie—he's pulling 'way round to the right. Flying Fairy's running right through the others. She's going like a greyhound with Coucci trying like a madman to keep her clear. They're at the eighth now—simply thundering round that first turn! These damn glasses bring me so near they make me feel as if I was riding with 'em myself! They're ..."

Larsen, sitting at his little box of switches, began to grin. He was looking at Townsend the way Diogenes would have looked at the honest man had he found him—as though he were a thing almost too precious to live. With a strange, almost reverent expression, he suddenly reached over and turned a switch. Then he sat back and listened as Middleton continued to describe the horse race. When it was finished, he closed the switch. Middleton turned, face flushed with pleasure and punched him on the shoulder.

"Did you see Wee Willie come through? Bill and I cleaned up that time! Wow!"

"Fine," said Larsen. He grinned. "By the way, in case you don't know it, you've just done your first broadcast. So help me God I had no business to do it, but it sounded so swell I turned you loose on the air!"

Townsend Middleton looked at him horrified. His face flushed crimson with embarrassment at the idea that thousands of people had been listening to what he'd thought was a private conversation. He felt the way people in earthquakes do when they wake up in hotel bedrooms and suddenly realize the hotel hasn't got walls any more. Then a light broke for him.

"Looky," he said. "Is *that* all I've got to do to be good at this stunt?"

"That and lay off the damns whenever you can. But you're not good, Towny, you're great."

"Well I'll be damned!" said Townsend Middleton.

"Not 'damned,'" said Larsen. "You'll be 'gol-darned.' Please, for the sake of the Careena Beauty Cream Company and the great almighty broadcasting company, and for my sake, just be 'gol-darned!'"

Townsend Middleton's broadcast of the American Derby at Arlington Park was sensational. His voice had a peculiar, intimate quality to it so that people listening to him didn't feel, as they so often do, that they were inferior outsiders being told by a hired expert what was happening. He somehow made them feel they were, perhaps, sitting in his box at the track as his guests and that he was telling them over his shoulder (as he had told his guests so many times in the past) just what was *really* happening. It was a bonanza to everyone except the postmen who delivered the letters of appreciation to the broadcasting company.

In Chicago he signed a contract for a sum that, compared to the income on twenty millions, was piffling, but that, for a man in his position, seemed staggering wealth. It was wealth, undeniable wealth. As Bill said, he could do anything he wanted with this money, which made it real money instead of the more or less wooden money they'd used in his past life.

From Chicago he went to Cleveland and did the Air Races; from there to St. Louis where he told everybody all about a prize fight that was taking place. He could, naturally, talk about these other sporting events as easily and fluently as he could about horse racing. He had been trained from babyhood in sport and, of course, occupying the prominent position he had in the sporting world, he knew intimately everyone in that world who mattered. He became far more celebrated than he had ever been before and he got a kick out of it—a great kick—because now he was celebrated because of something he was doing and not just because he'd happened to be born Morton Middleton's nephew. And there were no creditors connected with this kind of celebratedness—just people who wanted to know what he thought about this and that coming event and wanted his autograph and things like that. Now and then he thought about Sally—but she was so definitely part of something that existed no longer and he was having such fun working that these thoughts bothered him not at all.

Then in Los Angeles, where he was broadcasting a wrestling match, he got a telegram from Topsy. Like the telegram Bill had sent him in the long long ago, it was brief and to the point. It said:

BOOTS SHOW OPENING TO-MORROW NIGHT THINK YOU'D
BETTER BE HERE IF SWELLED HEAD NOT TOO LARGE TO FIT IN
PLANE NO LOVE TOPSY

Middleton opened it just as the current pachyderm champ was tossed into the press box, thus ceasing to be the current pachyderm champ. It gave him the most godawful homesickness he'd ever known. Topsy's crack about his head got him too. He hadn't forgotten in the fun of his new success what she'd done for him, nor had he forgotten Boots. Boots, had, in fact, been in his mind most of the time, but he'd been so busy meeting people and shaking hands with people and talking to people that he actually hadn't had time even to write to the only people in the world who really mattered to him. He jabbed his elbow in Bill's ribs.

"Go call the local broadcasting office an' tell 'em we want a plane to take us to New York starting at midnight. Tell 'em if I don't get there by to-morrow evening I'll never be able to talk again." He clutched his neck. "My throat," he said. "Got to see a specialist—that wrestler fell on me."

Townsend Middleton had forgotten the microphone was still in front of him. Larsen had not. He gave him one horrified look, then yelled to the ex-champ-pachyderm's seconds.

"Here!" He yelled. "Give me that wrestler!"

With that he picked up the wrestler and, displaying an amazing amount of skill for a non-athlete, threw him at Middleton. Being quite accustomed to being thrown here and there on order, the wrestler made it easy for him—even helped him a little by springing. Larsen stepped to the microphone.

"Townsend Middleton's hurt! Kyzbosky, wild at being thrown from the ring, is struggling with him! We're trying to calm him down."

At this point Townsend Middleton was struggling with Kyzbosky, whose involuntary onslaught had hurled both of them to the floor. Larsen picked up the mike and held it over them, so that the unearthly noises they made during the untangling operation were plainly audible on the air. Since Middleton now was, if not injured, at least damaged and didn't at all enjoy having pachyderms on top of him, he struggled not only manfully but vociferously. When Kyzbosky finally regained his feet and began to apologize, Larsen threw his switch.

"Damn you to hell, Middleton!" he said. "What bit you?"

Townsend smiled at him, slightly shamefaced.

"I want to be home," he said. "I want to be home to-morrow night

and I'm three thousand miles away."

"You're supposed to be home next week to do the Belmont—what's the matter with you?"

"I want a plane."

He handed the telegram to Larsen, who snatched at it and read it. Larsen was a sentimentalist at heart. He gave Towny a sort of cow look and said, "Aw, shoot! What if you miss it?"

"You don't get it," said Towny. "It's her first start. I've got to be there."

"Do you know," said Larsen, "sometimes you talk an awful funny language, Towny. Were you dropped when very young? I mean on a marble floor or anything?"

At this point they were leaving the stadium. They met Bill looking unhappy and slowly but brutally thrusting people out of his way since he was entering and everyone else departing. When he met them even the little pleasure he'd found in lifting people from his path left his face. He looked just plain sad.

"Sorry, Chief, you ain't so hot as I t'ought. Nuttin' doin' dey won't give you no plane."

But Bill was wrong, because when the three of them reached the entry hall of the stadium, the head of the local broadcasting station was standing by the door to intercept them. Middleton, who had had to lunch with him, recognized him at once and instantly clapped his hand to his throat.

"How bad is it?" The manager was all concern.

"Terrible!" Towny croaked. It was hard for him to croak, but he managed it.

"New York says there've been so many calls demanding you get a plane that by gosh you do get one. My car'll take you to United Airport now. You'll be in New York by to-morrow evening."

"Oh, swell!" said Townsend in his million-dollar voice. "That's awfully nice of you—really!" He nudged Bill. "We'll make the first act curtain, by God!"

The manager gave him a look.

"You'll make *what*?"

"The first act curtain," said Townsend calmly. "Thanks, Larsen—swell quick thinking—that wrestler throwing act of yours—I'll tell Boots and Topsy about it."

With the sort of bow he used once upon a time to give presidents of racing associations as they presented him with cups, he stepped out to

the manager's car and into it. As he did so, the tug at his heart that had started with the arrival of Topsy's telegram became almost a real pain. Boots—Greenhill—Boots' first start. He *had* to be there.

Townsend Middleton didn't get to New York in time for the opening curtain of "Sketchbook." High headwinds and the perversity of gasoline engines held him back. But he sent a telegram and by heroic efforts on the part of his pilot and the taxi man who drove him to the theater from the airport, did manage to arrive in time for the last act curtain. He got there just as Boots was finishing her last song, and fought his way backstage to a position in the wings. He was, here, entirely surrounded by pretty little girls with practically nothing on. He didn't see them at all.

He saw only Boots, standing alone in the soft glow of an amber spotlight. Behind her was what was supposed to be the ruins of an Irish castle—near Killarney, no doubt, for there were lakes in the background. On the ground at her feet lay a dead soldier (period of history unrecognizable) and the song she sang was one of those eerie, heart-tearing Irish laments. The sophisticated first-night audience that Townsend could see as a blur of white shirt fronts and sleek heads, sat hushed as she wailed in her clear sweet voice how her lover was gone from her away.

As he listened, Middleton forgot that the castle behind her looked, from his angle, awfully phoney. It was natural that he (as the producer also had) should think of it as ruined Greenhill and of the dead soldier as Pop O'Connel. It was even more natural that Boots should have suffered the same illusion. At any rate her eyes were starry in the light and looked, at the same time, misty with tears. When she finished, Middleton found his own eyes misty. He blinked in the dead silence—that still, tense silence that sometimes follows an outstanding performance when the audience have been for a little moment taken so far away into the hinterlands of dreams that it takes a second or so for their souls to get back into their bodies. Then the crashing, thundering storm of applause broke and the Broadway astronomers sensed that a new star had flashed into their firmament.

Middleton met her as she came off. She looked dazed, bewildered, but when she saw him her eyes brightened with sheer undisguised joy.

"Oh, Townsend! You did get here!"

Then, without consciously realizing what he was doing, he took her in his arms and held her pressed close to him.

"Had to," he said. "Your first start, Baby. I'm the stable companion. *Had* to get here." Then it happened. He lifted her face from where it was buried on his shoulder and said, "You're the loveliest thing I've ever seen—I don't know—since that night you came out with Tops to see me I've—oh, hell!"

Then he kissed her, gently, reverently. She sighed, pressed his hand, smiled.

"Oh, but I've wanted to do that for *such* a long time!" she said. Then she shook herself like a puppy coming out of the water. "Come on back to my dressing room. We'll talk. Towny, I've missed you so." She looked up at him as she led him by the hand through the maze of pretty little undressed girls and the men going "Mi-mi-mi-mi" and tapping their chests as though they thought they'd be noticed in the singing of the finale. "I've got Pete the Dalmatian there. I've listened to you every time you've talked. Topsy and Popsy and the Ashtons are coming back when show's over. We'll all go out and eat."

The dressing room was a mass of flowers, Dalmatian, and colored maid. Townsend, who had been feeling a little foolish since his emotional outburst, grinned. He looked at Boots and the flowers and nodded toward the maid.

"We don't do so bad, you and I," he said, "in our own professions."

"I think," said Boots, "that I wowed them."

"You wowed them," said Middleton. He grinned more broadly. "You wowed me all right."

"You wowed me years ago," said Boots. "Only you naturally didn't know it."

The sense of strangeness he'd had when he'd been with Boots before he went away had all passed now. They looked at one another and spoke not like a young man and a young woman who had just kissed each other really quite impassioned and for the first time. The feeling was much more that of married people reunited after a silly official separation.

"Boots, I guess I've loved you always. What are we going to do about it?"

She continued to stare at him, her eyes melting with affection, and said, "What about *Mrs.* Middleton?"

"I haven't seen or heard from her since she walked out. I'd almost forgotten about her."

The maid quickly withdrew behind a screen. Though neither of them had noticed her in some moments she was afraid they might and would stop. That, she thought, would be too bad.

"Sure, Townsend?" Boots almost shyly took his hand. "You see I know so much about you—I couldn't help it—growing up at your home. You're a giddy one. Always you were."

"You've grown up since you left home," said Townsend. "You don't even talk like a kid now."

"It's just because I am somebody now. Nobody treats me like a kid except you and," she laughed, "you don't, now."

"Oh, Boots, darling! I've missed you like hell!"

"You've grown up too, Townsend."

He nodded solemnly.

"I know," he said. "That's because I'm somebody now too. We're not both just—spongers."

Suddenly Boots laughed—merrily. She was exceedingly happy. In fact she was sitting spang on top of the world and was still so young she didn't know what a slippery seat that was to occupy.

"Faith and I never thought to hear The Himself say that about himself!"

"The what?"

"Oh, Pop and I always called you The Himself. You were God Almighty to us." She paused. "You were to me, anyway. In Ireland that's the way it is."

Middleton liked and yet he didn't like hearing her talk so. It thrilled him and it embarrassed him simultaneously. He said, "You've never been in Ireland."

The call boy knocked on the door.

"Miss O'Connel—Miss O'Connel—on stage for the fynally, Miss O'Connel."

Valerie Boots O'Connel allowed herself an instant of flashing triumph.

"Chief," she said, "I'd love like the devil for you to take me there sometime—but don't ever try and tell that audience out there that I've never been to Ireland. They wouldn't believe you!"

With that she kissed her hand and whisked out of the room. Middleton blinked some and sat down in the only chair available, which was before the dressing mirror. In the mirror he saw the colored maid and for the first time recognized her as Topsy's Lucy, borrowed for the occasion.

"Hello, Lucy," he said. "You caught yourself an earful, didn't you?"

“Yassuh, Mr. Middleton, I *did*!” She came out from behind the screen and planted herself Aunt Jemima fashion before him. “An’ Ah’m glad to see you-all comin’ to your senses, suh!”

“The Southern accent, Lucy, is distinctly painful to me. Talk New York accent. I want to know all about how Boots has been doing since she left—how Topsy got her the job—everything. You see, Lucy, I’m really awfully fond of her.”

Lucy talked New York accent, which was natural to her, and told him all about Boots’ try-out and rehearsals and how she’d get up every morning at five and go down in Josh Humber’s car to Belmont and gallop Black Mamba with the stable boys (Lucy didn’t approve of this) and then come back and work with the show people. Middleton listened, all ears. When Lucy ended up with “An’ by gosh she’s got that horse so fit she’ll win the Belmont!” He jumped out of his chair and threw his arms around her.

“Lucy! Boots is starting Mamba in the Belmont?”

“She sure is!”

“My gosh!”

“Miss Boots has her shirt on her too, Mr. Middleton.” Lucy laughed the infectious high laugh of her race. “*Her* shirt an’ Miss Topsy’s shirt and Mr. Humber’s shirt!”

“I’m broadcasting that race, you know,” said Middleton.

“You better broadcast that Mamby filly home in front then!” said Lucy. “If you want to be friends with Miss Boots!”

“Oh, I want to, all right,” said Townsend. “By the way, Lucy, got a drink? I’ve come a long way to get here, you know.”

“Yassuh!” said Lucy, immediately assuming her professional manner.

She mixed a highball from a sort of basket luncheon kit obviously loaned for the occasion by Humber. While she was so busied Middleton thought. He thought how very much had happened in the past few months. Then he thought, smugly, as men are apt to think when they’re successful, how very much pleasanter it was to have things this way than the way they used to be. Then, just as Lucy handed him the highball, he stopped thinking anything on the green earth was pleasant; for without even bothering to knock, Colonel Barnaby stepped into the room.

Colonel Barnaby, obviously loaded to the gunwales, but nevertheless seeming more capable than usual of getting himself about without spilling himself on odd bits of furniture, entered, bowed, handed his hat and stick to Lucy, and addressed Middleton.

"We've missed you,—Son!" he said. "Sally an' I've missed you like anything while you've been away at the wars."

"Don't call me Son, you bloody fourflusher!" said Townsend. He looked Barnaby squarely in the eyes. The Colonel started to wilt. Middleton said, "You and your daughter Magnolia are about the cheapest pair of swindlers who ever tried to swindle me. Get it? Get out!"

Then Colonel Barnaby stopped wilting. He'd remembered that Sally had told him his position was unassailable and, having succeeded in remembering this, he took courage from the thought that he was able to remember anything, and forged on.

"My daughtah will be here in just a moment. She's been breathless foah news of you." Here Barnaby struck an attitude. "Son, why didn't you let us know you were comin'? We just heard by chance that you-all were hyah."

Through the now open door of the dressing room came the strains of the finale of "Sketchbook." Middleton, since he'd been on his own, had learned enough to know that it would jigger the works nicely between him and Boots if she found the Barnaby outfit with him on this one night of her triumph—when he'd just told her he'd had no relationship with them. He gave the Colonel almost a Bill-glare.

"Get the hell out of here!" he said. "Pronto!"

Barnaby, completely wilted now, started to get out. But he got only as far as the door, because Sally happened at that instant to be coming through it the other way. She saw Townsend and instantly jumped to him and threw her arms around him.

"Oh, but it's good to have you back!"

Townsend Middleton tried desperately to get shed of her, but Sally was having none of it. He kicked her shins. She simply clung to him tighter. He swore at her. She murmured (very loudly) terrifically loving

things. He cursed her. He tried a jiu-jitsu hold that a Jap cook had once told him was infallible. It wasn't. Sally Barnaby Middleton clung to her husband, and while she was still clinging to her husband Valerie Boots O'Connel, joyous in her heart at rejoining what she thought of as her future husband, stepped into the room.

It is an odd thing, but if a gentleman is struggling as hard as ever he can not to be kissed by a lady, he looks exactly the other way around. In fact he looks worse. If there is an audience, he looks incredibly foolish. Townsend Middleton looked incredibly foolish at the instant Boots entered the room. He looked the other things too. Then he made the mistake of, for the first time in his life, forgetting the code he'd been brought up in. He yelled for help. He yelled, "Boots, Bill's at the stage door—send him in here quick—I think I'm being blackmailed."

Boots didn't think so at all. She simply thought that Townsend Middleton was, after all, turning out to be just exactly the sort of man she would have expected him to turn out to be, and it came quite near to breaking her heart.

"Lucy," she said, "bring my things to Miss Brice's room. I'll dress there." Then her feelings, that she'd been taught to control so well during her weeks of rehearsing and the try-outs, got the better of her. All the love in the world—the brokenhearted love—spilled out of her eyes.

"You're a liar, Townsend Middleton. So help me Saint Patrick I never thought *you'd* be that."

Then she left. Lucy, quickly gathering unmentionables, an evening dress and a bottle of aromatic, followed her. Lucy, like Topsy, had, in her own way, been around. She knew. Sally let go of Middleton. When she let go of him he wanted to hit her, but he didn't. He simply looked at her and said, "How much—do you want?"

Colonel Barnaby decided it was the moment to be suave.

"We're not unreasonable, you know, Son—after all, I mean after all ..." He couldn't remember what else he'd been going to say, so he stopped.

"I'm your wife," said Sally. "And I want plenty."

"You're a crook," said Middleton, "and you get nothing!" Then he said a lot of other things—mostly about people who come bashing their way into other people's lives just when they're about to have a chance of being happy for the first time in their lives. Then Bill came in. As usual, he gave a quick, informal salute.

"Chief, what's up? Boots said you needed me but she didn't say it

pretty. What's up, Chief?"

"Throw 'em out," said Townsend.

"Ah!" said Bill. The Barnaby contingent melted into the distance, each assisted by one of Bill's hands on the neck. He came back a moment later and found Middleton sitting at Boot's dressing table, staring, apparently, at his own folded hands. "She bite you? Get it cauterized."

"She bit me," said Middleton. "But not that way."

"Oh," said Bill.

Then Middleton, for the first time in all the harrowing experiences they'd been through together, broke down. He told him about Boots and about how he felt about Boots and about what he'd told Boots and about Sally and her phoney father coming in and bashing his life up again. He told him he thought one female had a right to bash up a guy's life only once—not twice.

Bill agreed. When Townsend had quite finished, he said, "All finished, Chief?"

"Oh, God," said Townsend, "I'm finished all right!"

"Den I tink I'll just go an' visit one of my classmates. Want to come along?"

"Oh, sure," said Middleton. "I've got no place to go. Who we going to visit?"

"Number Seven-six-five-seven-four-one. He was de class ahead of me. I just got a hunch he might know somethin'."

Middleton got up. He got up punch-drunk. It seemed to him too awful to be believed that this sort of thing—this business of his old life catching him up—could happen to him after he'd started out and was making his own way in the world. At the door he stopped.

"You're a good guy, Bill."

"I know it," said Bill. "Smart too. I got ideas."

"They must be swell," said Middleton.

"Dey are—I can fix dis Boots voysis Sally trouble like nuttin'! Okey dokey, Chief?"

Once again, Middleton broke down. He was so completely broken-down now that he was able to smile.

"Okey dokey."

The Belmont was run three days after the opening of "Sketchbook." Townsend spent those days frantically trying to get in touch with Boots and not in any way succeeding. He tried to get Topsy to intercede for him, but she merely said, "She thinks you're a two-timer and so do I," and hung up. Bill was away doing research work with his classmate. Towny was miserable with that poignant misery that makes intelligent people awfully wary about falling in love.

Boots was, of course, just as miserable, but misery fitted her work swell. The more misery she got into that final song of hers in the show the more the audience ate it up. Boots had arrived at one of the most coveted places a girl can achieve—and she'd have tossed it out of the window like *that* if by doing so she could undo what had been done that opening night. Lucy the maid had told her what had actually happened, but Boots thought Middleton had bribed her.

She drove to Belmont Park the day of the race with Sybil Ashton and Topsy. She was heavy-hearted and didn't care much what happened about it. She knew Townsend Middleton would be there and she knew he'd try and speak to her and she knew, no matter how funny she felt when she saw him, that she'd have nothing to do with him. The O'Connells were rotten with pride—always had been.

Townsend Middleton drove to the track alone, determined to find Boots and have it out with her. When the saddling bell rang he turned over his microphone to Larsen and said, "Harry, tell 'em about the old trees in front of the turf and field club and about who's here and about how perfectly gawdam beautiful every last little thing in the world is. I'll be back in time."

Larsen gave him a worried look, picked up the mike and began telling a great many people all about nothing. Like Middleton, he thought the Belmont track with its trees and tradition was beautiful. Like Middleton he'd been there too often to get any fun out of describing it. But it was their job—his and Middleton's—and he knew Middleton was in some sort of love jam, and he was glad to help him out. He'd been in love jams himself. But just by way of getting even with Towny for passing him the buck on the description of the track, he played up the fact of the

new Broadway sensation running for the first time: the famous horse that had run in the Derby when owned by the famous broadcasting company's famous sporting commentator Townsend Middleton. The listeners—particularly the lady listeners—wriggled appreciatively. Then Larsen did a dirty. He said, "Even now Towny's on his way down to the paddock to watch his ex-horse saddled for her new owner. What a picture—dramatic—" and so forth. He laid it on thick.

Even then Middleton was about halfway to the paddock. He was just passing the jockey rooms when he met Bill. Bill seemed in a panic.

"Chief!" He yelled, almost knocking Middleton down with his punch of greeting. "Chief, I got it! De record! Look!"

He reached in his pocket and pulled out a slip of paper. On it was a complete account of the doings of one Sally Barnaby Middleton during the past two years—only she wasn't called Sally Barnaby Middleton in this report. She was called Sarah Skanger. There were fingerprints attached to the report, and it came from the Cincinnati police department. Among other doings was a year spent as a guest of the State of Ohio for having married several wealthy citizens without bothering to go through the formality of divorce. As Townsend read, Bill went on.

"I got 'em to take prints from Greenhill. Dey matched poifect wid dese. Hell, Towny, you don't even get a divorce. You gets an annulment. Swell work, eh?"

Townsend nodded. It wasn't a very pleasant thing to read about a lady one had actually married. He nodded again. Then he said, "Thanks, Bill. Now come on with me and watch Mamby saddled."

They went on to the paddock, beautiful in its green turf and old trees that Larsen was telling the world about from the top of the stands. Presently they came to where the Belmont entries were slowly walking behind their stable ponies under the trees. There was a considerable crowd around Mamba, for she was a heavy favorite. They pushed their way through it to the inside of the circle where only the very select friends of the very select owners are allowed. Here were Topsy, looking terribly important, Sybil Ashton, looking at home, Elvira standing peacefully and comfortingly ahead of Black Mamba, Frayling looking worried, the wee apprentice boy Boots had hired to ride, and Boots herself. Boots was dressed in the extreme height of fashion as became a musical comedy star at the races, but she was doing the actual saddling of the filly herself—hauling on girths, patting her here and there, calling orders to the assisting stable boy, feeling the bit in Mamby's mouth. It was something to look at. Bill and Townsend stopped still and looked.

Then Townsend went forward and, standing close beside her, spoke.

"Boots," he said. "Please, Boots, understand!"

She stared hard at the saddlecloth. Topsy saw she was trembling aspenlike. Then she turned.

"You don't belong here, Townsend, this is the saddling ring. Go away."

"Well I love *dat*!" said Bill. "*He* don't belong here."

"He doesn't," said Boots. "Not now."

She hated saying it, but, silly child, thought she had to. The filly, as she gave a sudden and really too violent haul on her girths, kicked. The crowd fell back. Middleton stood perfectly still staring blindly like an ox that's been pole-axed. Then he turned:

"Come on, Bill, we've got a job to do here."

He put his arm through Bill's and, once again pushing through the crowd, lots of whom had now recognized him and called him by name, headed for the track.

"We belong 'way 'way up on top of the grandstand, Bill."

Bill didn't say anything. This was beyond him.

"Moses weeping on the mountain top," said Townsend.

"He never did!" said Bill, who had read his Bible in jail.

"I will," said Townsend; "but I hope Mamby does it for her, anyway."

"They're off! They're bunched, they're at the sixteenth; Flying Fairy's ahead; Black Mamba, 'way over on the outside, running third...."

This was an old story to Townsend now, this business of "they're off—they're at the sixteenth" and so on. He was telling it now as he always did; clearly, intimately; and if his voice, going out into all the thousands of rooms all over the world where people had met together to listen to him, sounded lacking in sparkle, the listeners thought it was because he must feel so strange at describing his ex-horse running in a race for somebody else. Larsen had given that angle a sweet build-up.

"They're at the far turn"—through those enormous binoculars Townsend could see the boy on Mamba crack her once with his whip. He talked on, but he was watching Mamba, naturally, much more than the others—even when, since she wasn't in the lead, he couldn't talk about her as much. "They're at the three quarters. Black Mamba's moving up!"

The crowd far below him saw her starting her move. A great muttering sound came up from them, for she was the favorite and her winning meant a great deal to them. But Middleton, through his glasses, saw she wasn't responding for this boy the way she used to in the days when Wee Willie would scream into her little ears, "*Now Mamby—run!*"

The horses rounded the last turn. Mamba on the outside, second now, with Flying Fairy just ahead of her. Mamba's jockey went to the whip, hard. "You damned fool jock!" said Middleton, forgetting the microphone. "Mamba's never had a whip laid to her like that in her life! You've lost it! You've lost it for Boots, you ass!"

All over the world people should have been horrified at hearing such strong talk penetrate their living rooms. Oddly enough, the only people who were horrified were those associated with the Careena Beauty Cream Company. The rest of the listeners ate it up. Here was romance—drama—laid right in their front parlors. Harry Larsen had done a very good build-up.

The race went on. Black Mamba ran because it was in her to run; but she'd been listening for that frantic shout flying to her on the wind and it hadn't come. To her this wasn't a race, after all—though she'd had all

the feeling that it was, in the paddock, with Boots and Elvira there. To her it seemed to be turning out to be just an overly hard practice schooling; so she didn't bother to put the wings on her feet that she knew were there. The voice she knew hadn't asked for them. Instead some dopey guy had hit her with a whip. Ah, well! She should worry about showing Flying Fairy she could beat him—she knew he knew she could do that any day of the week and twice on Sundays. She ran pretty hard, though, to put the others in their places. They weren't really in her class. She finished a comfortable second.

Middleton swore. The voice of the crowd floated up to him. It was none too pleased, because it was perfectly obvious, to all of them who'd seen the filly run before, that she wasn't really trying. Its voice—for a crowd has a distinct voice, either friendly or otherwise—was not friendly. Its members had lost money they'd worked hard for on what should have been a sure thing. Middleton, with Bill muttering sympathetic things in his ear, started down to the track. He was supposed to introduce the winning jockey to the multitude and, if possible, make the winning horse sneeze or whinny into the mike. He'd taught Bill to be a pretty good whinnyer. When he reached the little gate that led from the Turf and Field Club to the stewards' stand and thus to the rack, he saw for the first time that the yellow placard had gone up on the board announcing the results—which meant that Mamba's jockey had claimed a foul. He turned around and caught Larsen's eye. Larsen was naturally carrying on on top of the grandstand until the broadcasting time was up. Townsend pointed to the Result Board, and saw Larsen nod. Then one of the Pinkerton men who have been guarding Belmont this way and that way for years and years touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Middleton," he said, "the stewards want you in the judges' stand."

Townsend looked at him, puzzled.

"But Steve," he said, "I've nothing to do with racing any more—you know that."

Steve had a great bull bellow of a voice.

"The hell you haven't!" he roared, so that only about a thousand people in the near neighborhood could hear him. "You're still a member of the Jockey Club, an' you're the only man here at the track can decide the question' of the foul. *You're* the man who, lookin' through them big glasses, seen every move of it! Come on in, sir!"

Middleton, very puzzled, went to the judges' stand. The judges' stand

at Belmont is, as at most tracks, at the rail with a flight of steps perhaps some ten feet high leading to it. It is glass-enclosed on two sides. He nodded and shook hands with the stewards of the meeting and the judges. He'd known them all his life. They greeted him cordially. Presently the president of the association addressed him (quite formally, Townsend thought, considering they'd been cock-eyed lots of times together at Greenhill).

"Townsend," he said, "we're in a spot. Black Mamba's jockey maintains he was very roughly bumped and then crossed by Flying Fairy at the last turn. Our man stationed there can't say because both horses were 'way on the outside of the track. You could see." Here he looked around quickly, saw that no one was there except the other stewards and the two jockeys, and went on.

"You *could* see, Townsend. I know it's," he coughed, "an awful position to put you in considering—considering— Well, it's a hell of an imposition; but you've got to decide it. We can't—we honestly can't."

Townsend Middleton didn't think he'd ever forget how he felt in the few seconds following that request. All he had to do was to say, "Yes, he was crossed," and Boots would win the Belmont and all the bet she'd put on it; and he had proof now for Boots that would convince her like a shot that the monkey business in her dressing room was blackmail. All he had to do was say that one little word. He felt Bill nudging him, turned his ear close to Bill's.

"Look," said Bill.

Townsend looked out through the glass part of the judges' stand. Men were crowding closer and closer. Men with angry unpleasant faces. There were mutterings now amongst them. All of them knew Middleton. All of them knew about the mess at the Derby. All of them knew, thanks to the friendly but ill-advised bull-voiced Pinkerton man, that the decision had been put up to him. Cries drifted in through the glass.

"What about it, Towny? Gonna gyp us again?"

"We know what horse *your* money was on!"

"Yeah, we know, God help you!"

Townsend Middleton, when he decided was, oddly enough, thinking only that what he was about to say would probably cost Boots every nickel she had in the world and put her so far from him that he'd have to give up even trying to see her again. He didn't think of that menacing crowd outside at all. He turned to the president of the association. He managed to smile. He smiled whimsically, which is a horrible way to smile, but he didn't know it.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “there was no foul. Black Mamba was never touched by another horse through the whole race.” Then, since the horrified silence that greeted this remark seemed to need filling: “She was waiting for Wee Willie to yell at her. Instead of that, she felt this poor kid hit her with his bat. Mamby doesn’t like that. So far as I’m concerned, put up the red board.”

A moment later the president, looking at the crowd and taking his courage in both hands, pressed a button. Across from the judges’ stand the yellow placard signifying protest came down and the red one making the result official went up in its place. A moment after this the judges’ stand ceased to be glass-enclosed on two sides. It wasn’t even glass-enclosed on one side. Hired binoculars shied through its windows arranged that. Cries of, “Get that guy Middleton, show the——what we think of that kind of a——” and such rent the air. The bull-voiced Pinkerton man went down in the first rush. One of the stewards who had been through the war said, “Say, I’m sorry as hell, Towny, we’re going to have a fight about this—shouldn’t have got you mixed up in it—hardly fair.”

Bill, who had known from the start in his dumb way exactly what was going to happen, turned to Middleton and grinned. “I’m wit you, Chief!”

Then he stepped out onto the little balcony outside the stand, squared his shoulders, drew himself up to his full tremendous height and scowled.

“Come on, you bastards! I played fullback on de Sing Sing football team for three years an’ not witout reason. Come on! Try an’ touch my friend!”

The crowd—at least that unruly portion of them who had bowled over the Pinkerton man and had flung their rented field glasses through the windows of the judges’ stand—came on. Bill went down fighting. He’d been cut by flying glass, he’d had enough body hits to knock Max Schmeling cold, but he went down fighting. On the other side of the fence that keeps the Turf and Field audience away from the “people” and vice versa, there were cheers and cries and women fainting. They had never seen such a business in their lives. Here and there a Turf and Fielder jumped the fence and mixed it up with the first person he could find, amongst those storming the judges’ stand, who was willing to mix it up in hand-to-hand encounter. There were not too many.

On the little balcony, Middleton was standing over Bill, who had finally been temporarily removed from the world by a well-hurled

bottle. He was fighting. He'd done the right thing and he knew he'd done the right thing, and all these lice had wanted him to lie and he wouldn't lie—just so he could be popular and they'd win their rotten little bets. He was fighting now for himself and for Bill, who'd so often fought for him; and boy, he fought!

He was somewhat in the position of that old sportsman Horatius who held a bridge that couldn't accommodate too many people at one time. Each man that reached the top of the stairway he promptly socked in the jaw, and then the man went down the stairway. But, after a bit, they began coming two at a time; and then he began to bleed and his punches began losing their strength and the stewards, closeted behind him, began to worry about their skins—for they, being solons, were far too paunchy to join in this sort of *mêlée*. But Middleton, straddling Bill's body, still held his ground.

The riot was, as such things go, getting to be a pretty snappy riot, but the police hadn't yet had time to get there and put the quietus on it. Middleton still stood defending the now groaning remains of his own private gladiator. Then a bottle flew from somewhere quite far off in the crowd. It caught him on the side of the head and broke, cutting him so that blood spurted from his temple into his eyes. He shook his head, tried to get the blood away, couldn't do it.

"Oh, you swine!" he shouted. After that he began to collapse.

About a minute before Townsend Middleton got bunged by the bottle, Valerie Boots O'Connel got back to the clubhouse lawn, having seen her horse unsaddled. Boots knew perfectly well the horse had lost fairly without interference. She'd half-suspected Mamba'd lose anyway, without Wee Willie's riding; and she hadn't been able to afford Wee Willie. She hadn't expected, when she returned to the clubhouse lawn, to see the man she hated and loved above all others standing at the top of a rickety stairway with such a look of righteous indignation and fury in his eye as she'd never even imagined. She was halfway across the lawn heading for the riot before the bottle bunged. She saw it.

"Oh, for the love of God!" she cried when she saw the blood spurt from his temple. "I'll settle this in short order!"

She turned and yelled at the interested Turf and Fielders, who, so far, had been mostly noncombatants.

"You, Peter Ashton! What good's your squash and your court tennis if you're no good to fight! You, Jack Walters, with your golf, what's the good keepin' you fit?"

The already bewildered Turf and Fielders looked at her, even more bewildered. She went on, calling on all the gentlemen she knew by name, telling them what she thought of them for keeping themselves so damned fit and then making no use of their fitness when here was a time to use it. Finally she ended up with:

"I'll show you, ye petted spalpeens you!"

And with that Valerie Boots O'Connel, in spite of her fine dress and the fact that she was the newest and brightest star on Broadway, jumped the fence and waded into the riot.

Behind her came every last male member of the Turf and Field Club, but Boots had her own Irish way of fighting and she saw that her man was down now and suffering. She took her (Humber's, really) field glasses and swung them by their strap. Each time she swung she cracked a head, and the owner of the head dropped like a steer before her. Each time she swung she shouted the most appalling mixture of combined American and Irish cusswords that Belmont Park had ever heard. She couldn't have done it all alone, but she'd rallied the gentlemen behind

her, and she fought her way, losing bits of clothing as she went, to the top of the judges' stand. She reached there just as Middleton, entirely spent, went down in a muddled heap on top of Bill. She caught the man who'd delivered the K.O. punch to Middleton in her final crack with the field glasses.

"Be hittin' my people, will you? You slatherin' spite!"

Then she kicked him in the face. And then, as the Turf and Fielders arrived and the police arrived, the riot was over, and she found herself on her knees kissing Townsend Middleton over and over again, trying to bring him back to consciousness.

He came back to consciousness not so much because of Boots' laments as because his own private gladiator, who had fallen beneath him and was a very tough mug, came back to consciousness before him and got very disagreeable about being collapsed upon. He came back to realize a great noise of ambulance and police sirens.

"Where's the microphone?" he said. "Got to tell 'em about it—this is something."

Then he really woke up and realized what was going on. He moved off Bill. Boots' arms were still around him. He couldn't understand that, but he liked it. Bill got up.

"It takes me back to de old days," he said. "Before I got to be a gentleman, I mean."

Boots looked up at him. The expression on her face startled him so that he looked quickly away and batted his somewhat shaky knees together.

"It takes me back to the old days, too," said Boots.

Suddenly Bill, quite ignoring the excitement that was still going on around them, said, "Hey, Bootsie, I got proof Townsy's okay—I mean dat business de other night."

"I don't need proof now," said Boots. "I saw this afternoon he was okay."

Middleton, still groggy, reached for her. He hadn't to reach awfully far.

"Boots—" The million-dollar voice was shaky. "Boots, will you for God's sake marry me?"

"Not till you get divorced," said Boots. "But I'll come back to Greenhill and live there with you." She laughed. "I couldn't go on to-night anyway, I've got two lalapaloosa shiners."

Townsend didn't notice the black eyes she'd caught in the fight. He was looking far too deeply into her real shiners.

“You’ll come back to Greenhill with me—now?”

Larsen had arrived with a hand microphone in time to catch this entire awakening scene. About a million people heard Valerie Boots O’Connel quite unconsciously say, “You’re the only people I got, Townsend; try and stop me.”

About a million listeners were pretty well satisfied by that. So was Townsend Middleton.

Books by Eric Hatch

Fiction

A Couple of Quick Ones

Domestic Animal

Romance Prescribed

Lover's Loot

Five Days

Road Show

Fly-By-Night

My Man Godfrey

The Hatch Way

Good Old Jack

The Captain Needs a Mate

June Remembers

Unexpected Uncle

Words and Music

The Delinquent Ghost

The Unexpected Warrior

Spendthrift

The Beautiful Bequest

Crockett's Woman

The Golden Woman

The Year of the Horse (reprinted as *The Horse in the Gray Flannel Suit*)

The Colonel's Ladies

Two and Two is Six

Non-Fiction

Spousery: Her Edition

A Guide to Historic Sites in Connecticut

The Judge and the Junior Exhibitor

The Little Book of Bells

What Goes on in Horses' Heads

Screenplays

1931: Sidewalks of New York

1936: My Man Godfrey

1937: Topper

1957: My Man Godfrey

1968: The Horse in the Grey Flannel Suit

About the Author

ERIC STOW HATCH was an American author, staff writer on *The New Yorker* magazine, and also a screenwriter. Born in New York City on October 31, 1901, Eric was the son of May D. Hatch and her husband Frederic H. Hatch, owner of a successful Wall Street stock brokerage firm.

At age seventeen, Hatch dropped out of school and went to work for his father's firm. When his career was interrupted by World War I, he served two years with the New York National Guard. At the war's end he returned to Wall Street, but during that time he was also writing and having stories published. In addition, he served as *The New Yorker's* first sports columnist, covering steeplechasing, polo, and sailing.

By 1928 he was successful enough that he left Wall Street to devote his full time to writing. He wrote short stories, serials, and articles for *Liberty*, *Collier's*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and others.

Screwball comedies were staples of Hollywood film-making in the 1930s and 1940s. The situations depicted were usually ridiculous, but with one constant: silly, idle, rich people. This is the raw material Eric Hatch mined in nearly twenty novels written between 1928 and the early 1970s. He is best known for a short novel which became the 1936 hit film titled *My Man Godfrey*. The United States Library of Congress has deemed the film culturally significant and it is listed in the National Film Registry. *Spendthrift* was also released as a movie in 1936 but did not achieve similar fame.

Eric Hatch was an expert horseman, being a judge and steward for the American Horse Shows Association. This experience provided fodder for his story *The Year of the Horse*. It was a popular book and in 1968 was made into the Disney film entitled *The Horse in the Gray Flannel Suit*.

Eric Hatch died in Torrington, Connecticut, on July 4th, 1973, at the age of seventy-two, three weeks after judging his last horse show.

About the Artist

LEON GREGORI was born in Kiev in 1915 and came to America when he was very young. Someone saw him in the street making drawings on a brown paper bag! Eventually, he made his way to the Pratt Institute in New York to study art and illustration.

He worked on covers for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's* and also did many illustrations for *The New Yorker*. In addition, he illustrated book covers.

Gregori also worked for the big movie companies, 20th Century Fox and United Artists; he created storyboards for their movie posters. Revered in his field for his black-and-white ink drawings, he taught at the School of Visual Arts toward the end of his career.

His daughter, Mellon Tytell, a professional photographer, says:

“He always had a pad in front of him, and even watching TV, he would draw what was on the screen. When we went out for dinner, he would draw the other diners ... he would draw and draw and draw. The best thing was that he would make a drawing on the back of my raincoats and make wonderful birthday cards for his family.

“Every Christmas, he would volunteer with other members of the Society of Illustrators and make murals for children in the hospital, despite spending his entire life at the drawing board.

“My father passed away at the age of 86 in 2001. He was a kind man and a great artist.”

About this Book

Spendthrift was written by Eric Hatch (1901–1973), with front and rear cover art created by Leon Gregori (1915–2001).

This title was first published in 1936 by Little, Brown & Company as part of the hardcover omnibus *The Hatch Way*. *Spendthrift* was reprinted in 1948 by Bantam Books as a stand-alone paperback.

Description

Just a spendthrift ...

He spent his money

... on horses, liquor, and women ... on private railroad cars, servants, and stables. First he spent what he had, and then he started in on the fortune he hadn't inherited yet.

He spent his life

... doing nothing, in the nicest possible way. He squandered his time in the best bars, on the pleasantest polo fields, in the hottest honky-tonks, and the snazziest saloons. And he put in years waiting for Uncle Morton's high blood pressure to catch up with Uncle ... and hand the family fortune over to him.

He spent his love

... on chorus girls, southern belles, gold diggers, and assorted ladies on the make. He thought that was the one thing he'd really used up ... until he found out about the fighting heart of a beautiful stable-girl.

Source & Particulars

The cover, publisher's description, and story text are from the December 1948 Bantam Books paperback of 152 pages.

The author and artist bio pages are added content, as is the bibliography. The ebook title page and back cover closely capture the

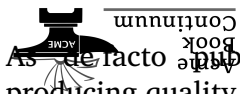
look and layout of the paperback originals, but are not absolutely identical.

Errata

In the first chapter, Elvira is introduced to the reader as a gelding, without using the word “gelding.” The pronoun “his” is used in direct reference to Elvira in the last sentence of the first paragraph.

At the end of chapter two, Elvira suddenly becomes a “she.” In chapter thirteen, Elvira is again referred to as “her,” but this is followed directly by a reference to Elvira as “him.” Perhaps a proofreader was confused by the female name for the neutered male pony?

To avoid confusion and maintain consistency with the author’s initial introduction of the character, Elvira remains a gelding throughout this ebook. These corrections and other minor changes are marked up with HTML comments and may be reversed if desired.

 Acme Book Continuum is dedicated to producing quality ebooks from rare and out-of-print paper titles with the intent of preserving the stories and artwork so they remain accessible to readers.

*This ebook was first published on August 6, 2024,
and updated on September 2, 2024.*

version 1.2



TOWNY MIDDLETON was the poorest millionaire in forty-eight states, the most poverty-stricken country squire who ever tried to juggle a large estate, a racing stable, and sky-high life on absolutely nothing per annum. But even if he didn't have a cent, Towny had plenty of trouble, women, expenses, women, worries, and . . . women!

TOPSY was a chorus girl, and she loved him . . .



SALLY was a southern belle, and she adored him . . .



BOOTS was strictly a stable-girl, and she worshipped him . . .

Something had to happen

EVERYTHING DID!

This low-priced Bantam book, complete and un-abridged, was made possible by the large sale and effective promotion of *The Hatch Way*, an omnibus of three Eric Hatch novels, published by Little, Brown & Company.

